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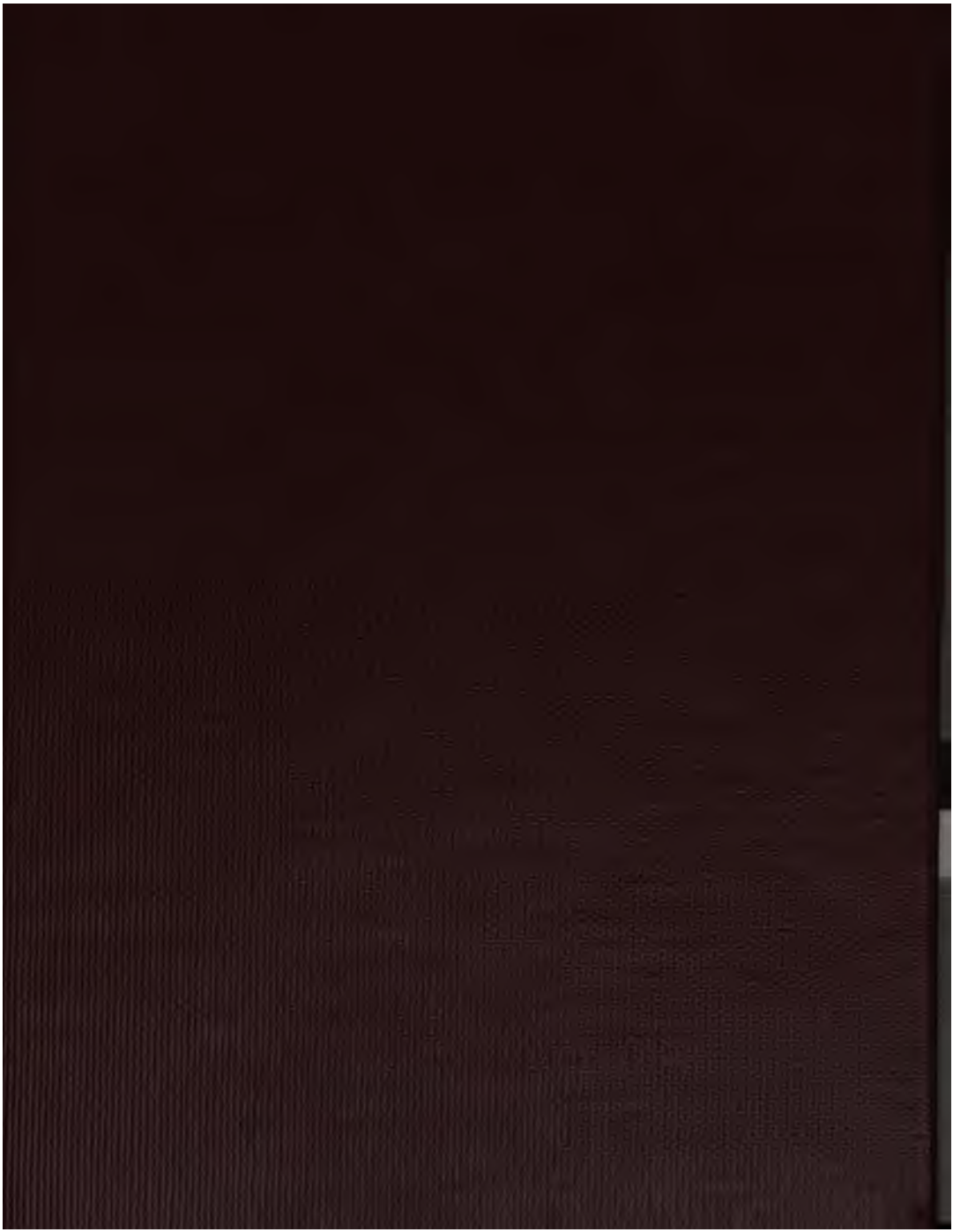

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THE THEATROCRAT

A TRAGIC PLAY OF CHURCH AND STAGE

THE THEATROCRAT

A TRAGIC PLAY OF CHURCH AND STAGE

BY

JOHN DAVIDSON

LONDON
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1905

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TO THE GENERATION KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

Break—break it open; let the knocker rust:
Consider no "shalt not", and no man's "must":
And, being entered, promptly take the lead,
Setting aside tradition, custom, creed;
Nor watch the balance of the huckster's beam;
Declare your hardiest thought, your proudest dream:
Await no summons; laugh at all rebuff;
High hearts and youth are destiny enough.
The mystery and the power enshrined in you
Are old as time and as the moment new:
And none but you can tell what part you play,
Nor can you tell until you make assay,
For this alone, this always, will succeed,
The miracle and magic of the deed.

JOHN DAVIDSON.

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INTRODUCTION

I

WORDSWORTH'S IMMORALITY AND MINE

Poetry is immoral. It will state any and every morality. It has done so. There is no passion of man or passion of Matter outside its province. It will expound with equal zest the twice incestuous intrigue of Satan, Sin, and Death, and the discarnate adoration of Dante for the most beatified lady in the world's record. There is no horror of deluge, fire, plague, or war it does not rejoice to utter; no evanescent hue, or scent, or sound, it cannot catch, secure, and reproduce in word and rhythm. The worship of Aphrodite and the worship of the Virgin are impossible without its ministration. It will celebrate the triumph of the pride of life riding to victory roughshod over friend and foe, and the flame-clad glory of the martyr who lives in

obloquy and dies in agony for an idea or a dream. Poetry is a statement of the world and of the Universe as the world can know it. Sometimes it is of its own time: sometimes it is ahead of time, reaching forward to a new and newer understanding and interpretation. In the latter case poetry is not only immoral in the Universal order; but also in relation to its own division of time: a great poet is very apt to be, for his own age and time, a great immoralist. This is a hard saying in England, where the current meaning of immorality is so narrow, nauseous, and stupid. I wish to transmute this depreciated word, to make it so eminent that men shall desire to be called immoralists. To be immoral is to be different: that says it precisely, stripped of all accretions, barnacles and seaweed, rust and slime: the keen keel swift to furrow the deep. The difference is always one of conduct: there is no other difference between man and man: from the first breath to the last, life in all its being and doing is conduct. The difference may be as slight as a change in the form of poetical expression or the mode of wearing the hair; or it may be as important as the sayings of Christ, as vast and significant as the French Revolution and the career of Napoleon. Nothing in life is interest-

ing except that differentiation which is immorality: the world would be a putrid stagnation without it, and greatness and glory impossible. Morality would never have founded the British Empire in India; it was English piracy that wrested from Iberia the control of the Spanish Main and the kingdom of the sea. War is empowered immorality: poetry is a warfare.

What I mean by Wordsworth's immorality begins to appear. This most naïve and majestic person, leading the proudest, cleanest, sweetest of lives, was, during all his poetical time, immoralist *sans tache*. In his boyhood he can think of no other atonement for a slight indignity done him than suicide; he is perverse and obstinate, defies chastisement—is rather proud of it, and slashes his whip through the family portrait; he breathes "among wild appetites and blind desires": delights and exults in "motions of savage instinct": sullen, wayward, intractable, nothing fascinates him except "dangerous feats." Even when his poetical time is spent, he can still do the thing that Wordsworth should do. Milton's watch being handed round, he takes out his own, a procedure that makes the company uneasy; and it is remembered against him by vulgar people who were present and felt foolish; but

Wordsworth would not have been Wordsworth had he left this undone. In Paris of the Revolution he "ranges the streets with an ardour previously unfelt," and remembers that the destiny of man has always hung upon a few individuals. Why should not he lead the Jacobins, carry freedom through Europe, and be the master of the world? He withdraws, however, and tells himself at the time it is lack of means; but "The Prelude," that miracle of self-knowledge and inferior blank verse, is more explicit:—

> "An insignificant stranger and obscure,
> And one moreover little graced with power
> Of eloquence even in my native speech,
> And all unfit for turmoil or intrigue."

Another "insignificant stranger and obscure," as "little graced with power of eloquence," ranged the streets of Paris devouring his heart about the same time as Wordsworth—devouring his heart and considering whether the Seine at once might not be his best goal. Had Wordsworth remained in Paris to contest the dictatorship with Napoleon? It is a dazzling might-have-been. Carlyle's remark on Wordsworth comes to mind at once:—

"He was essentially a cold, hard, silent, practical man, who, if he had not fallen into poetry, would

have done effectual work of some sort in the world. This was the impression one got of him as he looked out of his stern blue eyes superior to men and circumstances . . . a man of immense head and great jaws like a crocodile's, cast in a mould designed for prodigious work."

Carlyle's hatred of pleasure—an experience constitutionally impossible to himself; and his dyspeptic, neurasthenic distrust of happiness generally, corrupt all his judgments of men, and especially stultify his opinions of poets and poetry. His insane jealousy of all his contemporaries, which gave him a vision of Tennyson "sitting among his dead dogs"; in fine, his damnable Scotch-peasant's hypocrisy and agonized self-conceit as of a sinless and impotent Holy Willy, require to be cancelled ruthlessly after a scrupulous calculation, if we wish to disengage the actual features from the masterful caricature, lurid colour, violent gesture, false lights and falser shades, that mark his portraits. Having struck out Carlyle's contempt of Wordsworth as poet—poetry being an art Thomas himself had failed in; and having perceived the coldness, the hardness, the silence, and the stern look in the blue eyes, to be the necessary configuration of Wordsworth's intercourse with a

personality so antagonistic to his own as Carlyle's, we have remaining a being of great power and presence, whose magnitude and influence are more convincing in Carlyle's sketch than in any other account of the man, because of the limner's absolute standard, because of his passionate veracity, and because of the deep grudge overcome. Could Wordsworth, then, have been in any effective way the rival of Napoleon? Could he even have held together a strong opposition to be the bulwark of Napoleon's power? the cradle, nursery and academe of an enduring Napoleonic dynasty? It is the debated question of genius: is genius the gift of perfect conduct that may be bestowed, as circumstances determine, in war or poetry, in art or commerce? Men of the greatest ability have thought so, or said so, Carlyle among them, and therefore it is that I pause a moment, although on the very swell of this last interrogation—made, also, as if I had never inquired it of the fates before—I felt the answer to be an everlasting no. Cæsar wrote good journalistic prose, being his own war-correspondent, but his hexameters were of the same mark as Cicero's; Dante possessed all the eloquence Wordsworth lacked, and in his "De Monarchia" exhibits the very soul of sovereignty,

but his diplomacy and soldiership ended in bitter bread and death by heartbreak; therefore Cæsar could have indited a monumental poem, and Dante could have conquered Gaul and overthrown Pompey!

It is not probable that Wordsworth at any period in his youth would rather have been Cæsar than Dante. To have the world at one's absolute commandment for power and pleasure is the desire of most virile natures, and a desire seldom renounced by the highest intelligences, however closely disgrace and misery may dog them to the end. Accordingly, when intellect, health, and strength abdicate their heritage of the world we look for some tragic circumstance compulsive. In the case of Wordsworth we look in vain. The worst that befell him was the failure of his hopes in the French Revolution. He never sent down a personal root into the busy world at all: but had from the beginning a primitive-Christian contempt for power and wealth. His reluctance —it lasted for two years—to take up the burden of poetry is to be ascribed to the shame and horror of their destiny which great poets feel. A great poet fights against his fate as high women fight against passion. There is degradation and dismay in the ministration of poetry as in "the

ruddy offices of love"; but both the woman and the poet yield: for love and poetry, being of the race, are stronger than the individual.

Wordsworth's immorality, like all dynamic immorality, was what is called a return to nature. He wrote with perfect insight concerning poetry. There are many pregnant and convincing passages in his letters and prefaces: but I question if he ever found the terms characteristic of his own innovation. He said: "It may be safely affirmed that there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." Boldly, but not safely; and the substitution of "metrical composition" for "poetry" is distinctly equivocal. The discovery Wordsworth made was this:—That poetry is the least artificial of the arts; that, compared with music, painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry is not an art at all. Given an artist, the first condition of the arts proper is the possession of mechanical means. But the poet requires none; no pencils, colours, canvas, compasses, strings, or pipes. Language, the vehicle of his no-art, is part of the poet's, as of all men's, birthright; like food and air, he has it. And when he requires to supplement the language with which the conditions of existence endue

him, the founts are ready: there are no grapes to gather: that is not the winepress the poet must tread: he has only to drink from the sources of utterance. Thus poetry, like an artesian well, broaches the heart of Matter directly, and is its most intimate expression. It is almost sacrilegious to call poetry an art. Without any intermediary of violins, drums, trumpets, oils, palettes, brushes, mallets, chisels, furnaces, scaffolds, and conditioned only by language, the poet can utter that which is: the heart and the brain, the flesh, the bones and the marrow—Matter become subconscious, conscious, and self-conscious—are the orchestra and canvas of the poet's music and vision; marble and bronze, the Parthenon and Notre Dame, are misleading, unstable, and fleeting expressions of man and nature compared with poetry. The more I think of the true substance of poetry, the more impossible it is for me to see the necessity of Wordsworth's affirmation: and his own poetry, as has long been recognized, gives it the lie effectually.

As soon as he perceived the true nature of poetry, Wordsworth began to write it as if no one had ever written it before—an adventure commonly resented by the moralists of art, and in the case of Wordsworth attended by a

lifetime of detraction. Why did not the literary world rise up as one man and crown the poet who wrote in 1798, in his twenty-eighth year, the lines on Tintern Abbey? Why was Wordsworth left without an audience, driven back into himself, and thwarted in all his purposes, so that we have only—in "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" — the gateway, porch, and raw material of the city he meant to build? Why, but because he was an immoralist—he, and not Byron—saying in a new manner that which had not been said before: meaning something that schools and churches, theatres and institutions, the periodical press and the literature of the day, did not mean. Wordsworth had to think and imagine the world and the universe for himself: for him the creeds were outworn; for him "the smug routine and things allowed," in which the common mind and imagination and the estates of the realm live in most ages, were a dungeon and miasma. The imagination of Wordsworth could not breathe in any Greek mythology, any Christian Heaven and Hell, or theological system of the Universe. Out of all the mythologies, pagan and Christian, he culled this one thing only—the idea of spirit: which he whittled down finally in the ninth book of "The Excur-

sion" to an "active principle"—no longer a poetical but a metaphysical idea. Now, metaphysic is an aborted poetry. Poetry is concrete, requiring the exercise of all the material powers of body, mind, and soul, which, co-operating, are imagination. I have to use these words "mind" and "soul," because for what I wish to say there is as yet no language. I hold that men can think and imagine things for which there are no words: and that men must attend upon the expression of these things before all others: that these unsaid things are of more moment than all the literature and religion of the past: and that these things can in the first instance be said only by the poet, by one who makes words mean what he, that is, what Matter chooses. The mind, separating itself from the body and the soul, can transmute a figure of speech into a category; indeed, there is probably no figure of speech that could not be petrified into a metaphysic: metaphysics are the fossil remains of dead poetries. Also, the soul can separate itself from the body and the mind, and petrify a figure of speech into a theology: creeds are the fossil remains of dead religions. The body, the static and dynamic integer of which mind and soul are only exponents, is held in profound dis-

esteem by both metaphysic and theology. The metaphysician says, "The Universe is thought"; the theologian says, "The Universe is soul." It is as if one were to say "amber is electricity," or "iron is sound," or "the spindrift is the sea," or "this sure and firm-set earth is a word": all possible figures of speech, and therefore all liable in the hands of a pedant to be erected into a dogma. That was the tragedy of Wordsworth; his poetry became a pedantry. It was not age—a man may be a poet at eighty; it was not disease, as Wordsworth's health lasted to the end—besides, having once known what health and strength are, a man may be a poet although glued to the floor with consumption of the spinal marrow; it was not poverty, for Wordsworth was frugal, nor ever knew the hell it is to have to write for bread—besides, a man may be a poet starving in a London suburb: it was the want of a great audience and the world's applause that left Wordsworth to the pernicious obsession of a metaphysic, dried up his poetry and made him at last little better than a moralist. But whenever imagination had its way, when his powers of body, mind, and soul were in equipollence and co-operating, Wordsworth's immorality could be as free as Shakespeare's or Burns's, and could disport itself with

a *naïveté*, as in "The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale," impossible to Shakespeare and Burns, who were, both of them, men of the world; and no speech of Falstaff or of Hamlet, no song of the Jolly Beggars, approaches the stark utterance in "Rob Roy's Grave" of that immutable immorality which is the inmost complexion of the world.

What was it Wordsworth really wanted? He wanted what all great poets want, to extend his self-consciousness into the self-consciousness of the world. At whatever cost to himself, his actual and avowed aim was to live in the imagination of posterity to the end of time. In effect his poetry says, and his prefaces and his letters:—"What I desire—I make a present of it to all the humorists; I love them, and I wish I were a humorist: I make a present of it to all the wits; I love them also, and I would that I were witty: I make a present of it to all the fools, whom I love the most, for there I belong by reason of my *naïveté* and unworldliness: and, further, I make a present of it to all the impertinents and to all the malignants, whom I do not hate, for they are part of the whole—what I desire is to substitute for Christendom a William Wordsworthdom." The two potentates of English

literature in the nineteenth century, Carlyle and Wordsworth, had the same ambition—to furnish imagination with a new abiding-place: the Carlyledom, which the first would have substituted for Christendom, he called Hero-worship: Wordsworthdom is a Nature-worship.

Carlyle took the world of great men for his province. His Mirabeau, Mahomet, Cromwell, Frederick, have a somewhat closer resemblance to their historical originals than Shakespeare's Hamlet bears to the Hamlet of Saxo Grammaticus, the Hamlet who accomplished an unhesitating revenge, married two wives, and died in battle: yet into his chosen heroes Carlyle projected himself as passionately as Shakespeare projected himself into Macbeth and Lear, and his Cagliostro is as sympathetically drawn as his Burns. But men reject Carlyledom. Willing enough, temporarily, to worship themselves in Mahomet or Cromwell, they find the cult of great men so pursued to end in all unhappiness; which is intolerable. Two men did try to live in Carlyledom—Ruskin and Froude: and the end of them was asphyxiation: Carlyle had exhausted the air: they had only his breath to breathe. Carlyledom is a strait-jacket for the world, and a dusty way to death and to the dull hell of

the drill-sergeant and the knout. "Declined with thanks," says mankind.

Wordsworth's worship was of a higher strain than Carlyle's. He projected his own beauty of soul and his own strength of character into the world and into the universe. Tenderly he enters the delight of the daffodils: through the mountains he smites his powerful spirit. Into all beauty and into all grandeur he pours his own love and greatness, now an "eternal soul" clothed with the "unwearied joy" of the brook "dancing down its waterbreaks," now apparelled in "the Mighty Being" that

> "doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder everlastingly."

The Solitary Reaper, singing a Gaelic song, becomes, under the spell of Wordsworth, a living presence and a power as of an incarnate melody: and the same prodigious spell inspires the gaunt and dreadful Leech-gatherer. Conceive how harsh, how crude an image, however powerful, Balzac would have given of this, one of the most appalling figures in all literature; but Wordsworth so inspires his terrible Leech-gatherer with his own antique virtue, and so invests him with his own extraordinary majesty, that it is only now as

I point it out you recognize the indwelling horror of a portrait beside which the outcasts of the Russian realists lose all significance. But men reject Wordsworthdom. Two did try to live in it—John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold: but these were men of inferior temperament: and Mill also lacked imagination, while in Matthew Arnold imagination was a thing trained, as a tendon may, by special exercise, be developed into a muscle. Further, neither Mill nor Arnold had any childhood: they were never boys. Nowhere in Wordsworthdom is there any actual room for that which, failing a known surname, we still call by the "fond, adoptious Christendom" of Romance: there is little scope in Wordsworthdom for Napoleon or Wagner, for a great tragedy or a great triumph: nor is the universe the projection of a Wordsworthian humanity into space. Generation after generation may visit Carlyledom and Wordsworthdom, and there may always be a few vengeful or placid minds to make, or to try to make, a permanent abode in the frowning donjon of the one, or the pastoral peace of the other: but neither is an enduring habitation for the spirit of an era.

And now I come to my own immorality.

WORDSWORTH'S IMMORALITY & MINE

My four Testaments, "The Vivisector," "The Man Forbid," "The Empire Builder," and "The Prime Minister," may be likened to statues with subsidiary groups about their feet, and with panels in relief on the four sides of the pedestals. As a fresco in the series of my Testaments, and in order to bring home the matter contained in them by a closer application to life than is possible in dramatic monologue, also desiring to extend the circle of my readers and the effect of my message, I wrote in the autumn of 1904 "The Theatrocrat: a Tragic Play of Church and Stage." My hope was to have this tragedy published and another ready by this time; but like my own Knight of the Phœnix, "delays" are

> "the lackeys circumstance
> Provides abundantly for all my schemes."

On the night I finished "The Theatrocrat," being unable to sleep, I searched about for an anodyne, and fell upon Wordsworth, whom I had not looked into for twenty years. Remembering the tedium and general drowsiness of "The Excursion," I turned to it—to the last book, which I had not come within six of before. The pleasant catalogue of the opening began to operate when suddenly, like one hoist with his

own petard, I sat up more than broad awake upon the perusal of the sixteenth line—

"This is the freedom of the Universe."

I had written this line twice in "The Theatrocrat"! My memory is as treacherous as most memories, and although I had never read the last book of "The Excursion," I must in early days have read this line in scholastic writings on Wordsworth. Promptly I turned to my manuscript to change the line: but how could I? It was my meaning. Instead, I retained it; and placed it also on the title-page as my motto. A poet shall use that which belongs to him: it is the first characteristic of his genius that he cannot learn: he can only use; whether it be his own experience or the experience of others, he takes everywhere the matter and form that suit him.

Some account of "The Theatrocrat" and of how I came to write it seems necessary. My relations with the theatre are rather unusual. At a time when I was occupied with ballads and eclogues, Mr. Forbes Robertson, having looked into the volume of plays I wrote in Scotland, surprised me with an invitation to prepare a version of a French poetical play. It is no mere

fashion of speech to say "surprised": during the five years I had been in London, I had only once visited a theatre, and although I considered drama my true province, my calling and election had not yet become effectual, and I certainly had never dreamt of entering these regions under a foreign flag. But the proposal gratified me, was also suitable in several ways, and the play interesting. On the production of my adaptation at the Lyceum, the success of Mr. Robertson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell in the parts they played attracted the attention of managers to the adapter, and various proposals for versions were made: but no one as yet thought of giving me a commission for an original play: an adaptation of mine had succeeded, or seemed to succeed: therefore I was to be an adapter. Being somewhat mollified by seeming success—it was, as I said, Mr. Robertson and Mrs. Campbell who had actually succeeded—I began again upon a French play with considerable license of adaptation: but this license I overstepped, and the matter fell through. I then wrote a play of my own, and read it in succession to three managers, who listened politely: I afterwards published this play. Again I made a play of my own, this time upon commission, for the theatre is gallant,

and likes perseverance: but the actor-manager for whom I wrote it, deemed it unsuitable, and again I published. Being now under the lash of necessity, and not yet ready to die, having my Testaments and Tragedies to write, I accepted commissions for adaptations, and in due course made versions of five foreign dramatic pieces, and an adaptation of a French novel, besides writing, also upon commission, but at my own urgency, two original plays. This is an unusual record, and the comedy of it lies here:—Not one of these adaptations was in any degree of my own initiation, nor although I prepared them all faithfully and some of them *con amore*, would I have chosen any of them; yet it is by them my ability as a playwright has been tested: while my own plays, "Godfrida," "Self's the Man," "The Knight of the Maypole," and an unpublished Arthurian play remain unproduced. The dismay of it is this:—That my Testaments and Tragedies—the matter wherewith I propose to change the mood of the world—remain, those that are issued, unknown; and those that should be written, unwritten: whereas the successful production of my four plays, the likeliest poetical plays written for the English stage in these times, would have placed me in an independent

and dominant position from which all my writings could have come with that adventitious authority the world is powerless to disregard.

After the playgoing public had failed to appreciate an adaptation of mine, despite Mr. Lewis Waller's greatness in the part he played, and an adorable queen of Mrs. Patrick Campbell's, I discovered, upon various attempts, appeals, and challenges, that the stage would be well pleased to do without me in the meantime, and under these auspices, which I took to be the true evolutionary determinant, I began upon my own tragedies and wrote "The Theatrocrat: a Tragic Play of Church and Stage." This play derives its title from the rank and vocation of the protagonist, Sir Tristram Sumner, proprietor and manager of the Grosvenor Theatre. The meaning of the title will best appear in Sir Tristram's own words addressed to his friend and patron, the Bishop of St. James's. "I," says Sir Tristram,

"Became at last an artist: think of it!
I found myself the master of the mood,
Enchanting folk and playing on their nerves
As though an audience were a zither; made
A name far-sounding; and, by your good will,
Am now—Heaven save the mark! the banal end!—
Am now Sir Tristram Sumner, nominal,
As well as actual, theatrocrat;"

and the significance of the sub-title will come home to the reader in the following extract from the diatribe of an exasperated actor addressed to Sir Tristram himself:—

> "When plays were damned
> By churchmen, and the player a citizen
> Of rascaldom on sufferance living only,
> Great was the stage . . .
> When the monarch set
> The lethal signet on the theatre
> Of gross respectability, knighting you,
> Sir Tristram, and other players unfortunate,
> Ranking you in the state with grocers, brewers,
> Distillers, lawyers, vicars, aldermen,
> He dealt a double blow at church and stage,
> And both are bleeding from the wound."

The reader notes the special application here, and distinguishes also between religion and the church, remembering the religious import of the Attic drama. The plot of the play is simple. Sir Tristram Sumner, a man of remarkable ability, having led an inharmonious life, has reached that period when the material powers of mind and soul begin to rebel against the over-indulged body, and are apt to declare themselves in megalomaniacal obsessions. His instinct, once infallible, misleads him, and he determines, against all advice, to produce Shakespeare's "Troilus and

Cressida." His wife, originally a beautiful and healthy woman, has shared her husband's sensuality, and is now haggard and neurotic, her ill-used soul asserting itself discordantly in trances and telepathic visions. She is haunted by the fancy that the play will succeed if Warwick Groom, a disgraced actor of genius, takes the part of Troilus. Sir Tristram, who knows that Lady Sumner had loved Warwick in her youth, has developed a fierce jealousy of his former rival and a deadly hate for his wife; but his financial position is so perilous, and his wife's premonitions have been hitherto so reliable, that he dare not disregard her brain-sick counsel. Warwick Groom's besetting vice, drunkenness, prevents his appearance as Troilus, and the play fails. Bankruptcy and the end have come. But now the Bishop of St. James's intervenes, and finances Sir Tristram in order to produce a play of his own. St. James's has a message to deliver, and prefers the theatre to the pulpit. On the night of the production of his play he himself is to introduce it in a guarded speech: but soon—a true propagandist—

> "He stands entranced,
> With face uplifted like a seraph, pealing
> Material music, from his prologue worlds
> Away."

At last the incensed audience, led by a "fighting parson" from the stalls, invades the stage. St. James's is mobbed and dies of his injuries. Of Sir Tristram's *liaison* with Europa Troop, an American actress; of Lady Sumner's suicide, and the murder of Sir Tristram by Warwick Groom, I say nothing here. My present concern is with St. James's message, which is also mine: my statement of the world, and of the Universe as the world can know it. I should add that there is no key to "The Theatrocrat": all the people in it are made essentially out of the good and evil in myself. My statement of the world and of the Universe as the world can know it has offended and will offend; but I have no purpose of offence; nor am I concerned to please: my purpose is to say that which is, to speak for the Universe. I mean nothing occult or mystical; only the natural mystery of Matter. Man consists of the same Matter as the sun and the stars and the omnipresent Ether; he is therefore the Universe become conscious; in him the Universe thinks and imagines; and every man who trusts himself trusts the Universe, and can say that which is. I announced at the outset that I wished to transmute the depreciated word "immorality," and admitted the difficulty of such a

feat of verbal alchemy in England, where the current meaning of immorality is so narrow, nauseous, and stupid. And yet nothing could be simpler than such a transmutation. We know now that there is no moral order of the Universe, but that everything is constantly changing and becoming and returning to its first condition in a perpetual round of evolution and devolution; and this eternal tide of Matter, this restless ebb and flow, I call Immorality. All men and things have a Will to be Moral, have a Will to Righteousness —the metaphysic of religion. The omnipresent Ether would fain be an established moral order of Ether, pure, imponderable, invisible, constant; but that thorn in the flesh, electricity, evolves from the Ether while still interpenetrated by it, and the moral order of the Ether is at end. Electricity, the first analysable form of Matter, for we have not yet isolated a sample of the Ether, would fain be electricity, pure and perfect bi-sexuality and nothing else; but hardly has it had time to adjust its negative and positive poles when it begins to secrete hydrogen, and this wanton seminary of Matter once opened, some seventy or eighty elements are soon scored against the demoralized electricity. Among men there is the same intense Will to Morality. How

slowly a moral order decays! Apollo and Aphrodite are still alive in the fancy of men! The massacre of Saint Bartholomew, the depletion of the manhood of France by the revocation of the edict of Nantes, the war of the Fronde, the horrors of the Revolution, of the wars of Napoleon, of the Franco-German war and of the Commune, which were the evolution of the French Republic, witness the tenacity of an old order, and how utterly regardless of the cost of its establishment a new order is. The Universe is immoral, and no sooner has a morality of any order established itself than the Universe begins to undo it. To me the centuries of Christendom are only as a moment of time which has ended, and in my heart I believe

> "Terrific war
> Will burst the chrysalis, the Christendom,
> That hangs in rags about the eager soul,
> Already wing'd and rich with crimson stains,
> With sulphur plumes and violet, green and gold,
> Psyche at last, pure Matter of itself!"

I have repeatedly attempted to speak this that I am writing, and have always failed, coming out of it in a dumb rage. It is true that no man, great or small, was ever so tongue-tied as I am; but it is also true that the people one talks with who are consciously interested in the Universe

are almost always either theologians or metaphysicians, men of dogma and system who can neither think nor imagine beyond their rubrics: poetry to them is on the other side of the hedge; it may be a vineyard, but they are tethered in their own plot of thistles, and very well satisfied too. I have no system; I have no dogma: it is a new poetry I bring. For me there is nothing immaterial; for me everything matters; for me there is nothing behind phenomena: the very "thing in itself" is phenomenon; phenomena *are* the Universe. I, doubtless, prefer to drop such words as "phenomenon," such phrases as "thing in itself," specialized out of all meaning, precisely as the Bishop of St. James's and I drop all legends

> "Of dead men come alive, and signs and shows
> Of tongues and thunders, cures and stigmata,
> Which are no mystery but the quaint alarm
> Of ignorance, that harnessed vision against
> The things that be in sterile dreams of spirit,
> As banal, venomous-moral, hard and fast
> As Matter is mysterious, fluent, pure,
> Filling the Universe with miracle,
> Filling and being the Universe itself."

I am not an atheist. The words atheist and atheism, infidel and infidelity, seem to me misnomers, mere childish nicknames, unpoetical, inapplicable, feebly malignant; you cannot dis-

believe in what is not; so violent a reaction as disbelief intimates the existence of that which is antagonized: one might as well say, "There is no Hamlet; there is no Don Quixote," as affirm the nonentity of God. Indeed and indeed there has been nothing but God for many a century. For the active world, the money-making, breeding, pleasure-seeking, power-loving world, the rulers, artists, poets, merchants, soldiers, the great world as distinguished from the studious faction of scientists, theologians, philosophers, and men of letters—an insignificant and negligible minority in this particular: for this great world, God sums imagination; not an idea; no, the Ancient of Days, the Almighty; called a spirit, but a most Material, most poetical God, who created the world out of nothing, with the sun to light it by day and the moon and stars by night; who made man in His own image; who sent His son to atone for His creatures' backslidings; and who provided Heaven for the repentant sinner, and Hell for the unregenerate; for God and Sin and Heaven and Hell that *are* not

> "Are yet the very texture of the world,
> Kings, magistracies, warriors, wisdom, love,
> Being knit in Heaven and Hell. in God and Sin,
> Like blood, nerve. sinew, bone in living flesh."

But a minority are no longer knit up in this divine texture. When science found out that the world and man had not been created at all—could not possibly have been created or made in any sense of these terms; that instead of the sun being specially prepared as a lantern to light the earth, the earth is really an offscouring of the sun; and when it searched the Universe and sampled it with its telescope, discovering although it plunged vision through thousands of millions of miles that there was no lodge anywhere for Heaven, no pit to be the continent of Hell, but only illimitable tracts of incandescent orbs, each the centre of a system to which our solar nook of space is as a little room by candle-light compared with that very sunlit space itself, then science knew, as I know, that the theological system of the Universe is an error of man's ignorance: an error so wonderful and so significant that I still attend upon the adequate expression of its true intention. In the Matter of God and Sin and Heaven and Hell, men of letters are apt to be lukewarm—not all, but the majority. I exclude poets from the class of men of letters. Men of letters are humane, moral, civilized, cultured, sceptical; whereas poets are inhuman, immoral, barbaric, imaginative, and trustful. With most

literary critics, publicists, journalists, dealers in the humanities, and professional people generally, God and Sin and Heaven and Hell are not debateable subjects. Why should anyone nowadays concern himself about these things? If they are not dead and done with, it is bad taste to discuss them in a secular work; if they are dead and done with, it is worse taste, and a waste of time to lug them into the light of day: arguments that seem to me unanswerable; but here am I with these dead things to bury, and my message to deliver.

What the theologian calls God, the metaphysician calls by various names. One will tell you that the world is a Will to Live rushing into being. Another will say, "That does not account for man: if a Will to Live is the thing in itself, man is *de trop*, for man is the greatest foe life has. Other animals kill only to satisfy hunger; but man, although for food and for sport he preserves life, yet for sport, for food, for adornment, and to make room for himself, man has destroyed, and continues to destroy, life by whole species, including those of his own kind. No, there is something behind the Will to Live, and that is the Will to Power. A Will to Power accounts for man; man, the tamer of the tide, of the lion

and the lightning; and man, the tamer of man." But anyone can make a metaphysic; it is a splendid image, that of splitting logs. Thus we can prove easily that the world is a Will to Death; for that indeed is the end of a pessimistic philosophy, the suicide of the race. I have, myself, made and applied a perfect metaphysic in the few hundred lines of the "Testament of a Vivisector," where the thing in itself is represented as a Will to Know:

> "It may be Matter in itself is pain
> Sweetened in sexual love, that so mankind,
> The medium of Matter's consciousness,
> May never cease to know—the stolid bent
> Of Matter, the infinite vanity
> Of the Universe being evermore self-knowledge."

There was a passing gibe at theologians a moment ago, but one has only to remember how great a thing it is they study, one has only to descry for a moment the ancient and glorious realm in which the minds and imaginations of theologians have their being, to know and understand their integrity and passion. But theology is now, like so many names, a misnomer. By the application of scientific methods the more rigorous minds, although still speaking—I think, equivocally—of theology, have really brought about

a theonomy. Scientific method destroyed astrology, and gave us in exchange for a superstitious obsession, astronomy and the Universe. Scientific method has destroyed theology. But the theologians, powerless to admit it because most humanly reluctant to drop so sublime a thing, have allowed themselves to gloze the Material God who made the world, who sent His son to die for sinners, who reared high Heaven and dug deep Hell—I say the theologians have thought away all this that was so great, and have spun out, not the heart of it but the husk of it, into a metaphysical idea of God; have, the more advanced and veracious minds among them, set aside the incarnation and the atonement, offering instead the engaging person and beautiful immorality of Christ:—still an immorality, Christ's teaching; let anyone attempt to turn the other cheek in any playground, parliament, court of justice, college, exchange, club, or Convocation, and he will know with a vengeance what it means to be immoral:—and in the matter of Heaven and Hell, have, most honestly, nothing to say; whereas the true theonomist finds the study of God to be a branch of mythology. In my ballads I have employed this of God and Sin and Heaven and Hell as the warp of myth in the

loom of my poetry, giving the myth also a new orientation as the weaver changes the pattern of his web—an orientation which I have carried to its utmost limit in the Judgment-day of the "Prime Minister"; but no individual mind and imagination, and no general mind and imagination of any class, mass, or mob of men can enter a fateful battle in the name of a metaphysic, can live highly and die serenely to the tune of a mere folklore. I cry aloud with the Bishop of St. James's:—

"Who shall persuade the Kings that God is not,
The politicians, usurers, financiers,
Priests, warriors that depend on God to bear
The burden of their inhumanities?
All inhumanity that flings itself
On God's unsearchable device will fight
To the last drop of blood, last labouring sigh
For God and Heaven and Hell. And who shall teach
The orphans that their mothers are not; who
Unpeople heaven of lovers, children, saints?
Women will fight with babies at their breasts,
Old palsied hags, peace-makers, cripples, cowards,
When this is put to war! Their sons that died
In battle, where are they? Their enemies,
That should lament in Hell? The little child,
That lived a year and holds its parents' hearts
In dimpled hands for ever? Christ Himself
That pardoned wanton women, where is He?"

It was a great conception of the Universe; it made life intensely interesting; and still domin-

ates imagination. Even those who understand that the material Other World in which the imagination of our more immediate forefathers lived and moved and had so great a being is as phantasmal as Olympus or Asgard, know well that when the blood and the brain and the bones and the marrow are fused together into an act of imagination by love, or war, by some profound sorrow, some high ambition, some great self-sacrifice, or some great crime, men immediately, and without effort, become immortal soul, and clothe themselves as of old in God and Sin and Heaven and Hell. As becomes one who proposes to furnish imagination with a new abode, I now state what Heaven and Hell and God and Sin are, and undertake to show that what I offer is truly immoral, and of the evolving and devolving Universe.

II

HEAVEN AND HELL

How is it that imagination lives with ease in a material Heaven and Hell, although these are known to be impossible? What is the meaning of that? It means that there is no Other World; that the whole Universe consists of the same Matter as man; and therefore it is that even the most upright minds, the most enfranchised souls, the strongest and sanest temperaments in passionate moods and times of stress, when imagination, expanding, must fill some splendid place, fly, as to a city of refuge, having no other conception of the Universe, to this concrete Heaven and Hell. Man is Matter; mind and soul are material forces; there is no spiritual world as distinct from the material world; all psychical phenomena are material phenomena, the result of the operation of material forces; hence, I say again, the imagination of man, being a complex of material forces, cannot live in a metaphysical idea or an

acknowledged myth, but makes its Heaven and Hell concrete, and itself immortal soul. What is the source of this immortal soul with its flaming Hell and glowing Heaven?

Man being Matter, and thought and fancy being material forces, we shall find in the history of Matter the origin of much that seems obscure. Man consists of the following properties of Matter; oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, kalium, natrium, sulphur, phosphorus, iron, magnesium, silicon, chlorine, fluorine, lithium, manganese, copper, lead. I invite the reader to consider this with all the material forces of his being. These forms of Matter with their energies, of which the body, mind, and soul of man consist, have always been; they burn in the farthest stars, they are knit up in the texture —thinner than gossamer, than vapour, as imponderable as fancy—of the primitive substance, the Ether, which fills the interstellar spaces from moon to sun, from orbit to orbit, from galaxy to galaxy, the exquisite material out of which the nebulæ are constringed in beads and drops and clots of Matter upon threads of lightning, meteors, meteorites, that collide into flame, or by what process soever, to become upon condensation, concentration, contraction, systems

and constellations, suns and planets. The whole Matter of man, however mutable, is therefore everlasting, has no beginning and will have no end; for Matter is indestructible. The earths, metals, vapours, mysterious properties of the one mystery Matter, which make up man, are in themselves supposed to be unconscious: sensitive in every electron, but in all likelihood without sensibility and therefore unconscious. Sensitive all forms of Matter are; the elements have individuality, character, genius; have passions—fierce passions, some of them; have memory, more or less positive, far-reaching, and reliable. Oxygen seems to be the chief male element, the sultan of Matter, with his seraglio of dazzling metals, earths, vapours, not one of which he ever fails to remember; it is he who knits up the rocks and ridges of the globe, the bones of men and beasts; he supports all fires of suns and hearts; he is the food of flame and the fibre of the shower which extinguishes flame; and, by a miracle of male parthenogenesis, with lightning for accoucheur in place of Vulcan and his hammer, it is he who brings forth the crystalline virgin ozone to clear the air of the world. Hydrogen, the ethereal and versatile vapour, whose passionate flame is the light and heat of

the most brilliant and the hottest stars, whose delicate and fluent being is also the feminine principle in water—the exquisite hermaphrodite that flows so wooingly about the world—forgets not her way in the sea, nor ever foregoes her purpose in plants and animals. Carbon, the workman among the elements, the artist, the artificer, the labouring class, and the proletariate of Matter, is the form one likes the best; he is coal and the diamond, wine and blood, the seed of plants and animals, love and poetry, lust and slaughter, wood and flesh, and bones and rocks; the texture of all life; the human element, the diabolic element, the divine element. These three highly individualized, genial, passionate and many-sided forms, along with nitrogen, a loose-living, dissolute gas whose will is to decay; phosphorus, white and red, the Jekyll and Hyde of the elements; sulphur, a gold-hued wonder of twice three transformations; calcium, silicon, iron, and the rest, constitute the body of man; his energies, vital, reproductive, mental, and spiritual, are the sums of the energies of these various forms of Matter. Consider it! In this alone there is a new world of poetry, a new world of humour. Oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, sulphur, natrium, kalium,

magnesium, iron, silicon, the principal constituents of the whole of the Universe have become in man subconscious, conscious, and self-conscious; it is infinitely satisfying to know it, write it, say it, think it. These dozen mysterious forms of Matter the Mysterious have become man; and all their prodigious powers of expansion, cohesion, magnetic and electric energies, intense and hungry chemical affinities, miraculous transformations, radiations, isomerisms, allotropisms, and the continuous, passionate, omnipresent pulses of molecular attraction and interatomic motion are converted into vitality, generative power, muscular energy, nervous energy, into cerebration, emotion, passion, imagination, material forces all. This is a high and great thing, and when the general mind and imagination live in it, the mood of the world will undergo an unparagoned change.

I am now to answer the question, What is the source of this immortal soul with its flaming Hell and glowing Heaven? These dozen mysterious, mutable forms of Matter the indestructible, being the principal constituents of the whole Universe, have become in man conscious; and man, before he understands, calls this indestructibility of the Matter of which he consists immortal

soul. Wordsworth has it wonderfully, building better than he knew, for it was Matter that spoke when Wordsworth said—

> "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting
> And cometh from afar.
> Not in entire forgetfulness
> And not in utter nakedness
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God who is our home;"

that is, from the all-pervading Ether, our primeval home, the original form of Matter which fills space; the imponderable Ether in which the suns and systems float, having evolved with all that they contain from that very plasmic Ether. Again, all Matter having memory, and man being Matter grown conscious—a metaphysic for this would be the World as Memory rushing into Consciousness; but however that be expressed, man's idea of the Universe before he knows its true configuration or how it arose, is certain to contain some suggestion of the actual becoming of things; and that suggestion will naturally derive from subconscious recollections of impressive events in the history of Matter. In the history of the solar system after the unbegun period of its existence dissolved in the

plasmic Ether, the first impressive event is electrical evolution, when the Matter of the sun and the planets overbrimmed solar space as a globular or spiral nebula. Every particle of earth was all luminous in that pristine light: the pen I write with, the paper I write on, my hand that writes, and my brain that instructs my hand. The next important event is the condensation and contraction of the nebula with the segregation of the planets, when all the chemical affinities, the energies of electricity and heat, radiative action, centrifugal and centripetal forces and the force of gravitation kept up for millions of years a war of the elements no atom of Matter can ever forget. The blood, the brain, the bones, the flesh, and the marrow, retaining an indelible impression of their placid existence in the unbegun Ether, of the diaphanous light of the nebula, and of the terrific time of infernal tumult when the solar system was evolved, suggested to man, when his highly developed consciousness begat a still unenlightened idea of the Universe, that splendour on high, his glowing Heaven of light, and that horror below, his fiery Hell of torment. This is pure poetry. Eloquence not being my purpose in this preface, I have expounded it in strict Matter-of-fact prose; but

being Matter of Imagination all compact, a truer poetical form will be found in "The Testament of a Prime Minister."[1]

Heaven and Hell, then, are subconscious recollections of the peace of the Ether, of the glory of the nebula, and of the condensation and contraction suffered by the Matter of which man consists during the millions of millions of years of the evolution of the solar system, perdurable experiences impressed on every molecule, every atom, every electron of the globe and of man; and when I invite the imagination of the world to take up its abode in the actual poetry of Matter, it is a true devolution I desire, comparable to the return of Matter through vapour and lightning into the all-pervading Ether.

[1] pp. 98–100.

III

INTERLUDE

I STYLED the Universe a Memory rushing into Consciousness. It may also be called by as many metaphysics as there are properties and qualities in Matter, and in Matter's accomplishment, man —a Will to Happiness, a Will to Misery; a Will to be Hydrogen, fully developed in all the hottest stars; a Will to Love, a Will to Hate; a Will to be Lightning, into which everything devolves on its way back to the Ether; a Will to Live, a Will to Die; a Will to Beauty, the metaphysic of art; a Will to be the Ether, which everything was, and is, and will again be. I say this to remind the reader that all mental and spiritual qualities and properties are contained in the forms of Matter which become at last fully conscious in man.

There was truth in astromancy. Man, consisting of the same Matter as the stars, felt his kinship, and, being uninstructed, built up assiduously his judicial astrology to explain, what

every atom of his body knew subconsciously, his identity with Sirius and Aldebaran. There was truth in alchemy, more truth than in astrology. The prime idea of alchemy, the transmutation of Matter, is absolutely true. Uranium, thorium, radium, have been detected in the act of secreting and producing other elements, which new elements, it is almost certain, change, possibly by way of hydrogen, into electricity—rapidly in the cases of uranium and thorium, very slowly in the case of radium—and from electricity devolve back into the primitive form of Matter, the Ether. And such is the history of all Matter: from the Ether through cycles of change back to the Ether. Man, being this transmutable, indestructible matter become conscious, had from the beginning the knowledge of these properties of Matter within him, and, while still uninstructed, conceived the ideas of the transmutation of metals by the philosopher's stone, and of the prolonging of life indefinitely by that same philosopher's stone dissolved into the elixir of life: the one idea, practically true; the other, a fantastic intimation of the indestructibility of the Matter of which man consists. There was truth in witchcraft and sorcery. Modern hypnotism can exhibit phenomena as wonderful as anything

recorded of black magic or white; and I am certain when I remember the properties and qualities of the elements of which he is compounded, that there are other material powers in man awaiting discovery. I understand the list of human elements is correct as far as it goes: about some eighteen are given, including those that are barely traceable. I cannot conceive what further powers may be discovered in man; but I allow myself an interlude to suggest that there are other elements besides the current list in the Matter of which he consists.

The rare gases recently discovered in the atmosphere, helium, neon, argon, krypton, xenon, and the unknown members of that group, certain to be found—have these zero gases, as they are called, been sought for in man? Hitherto their story is a blank, as it is impossible to unite them chemically with any element; but they constitute one per cent. of the mechanical mixture of gases which we breathe. What are they doing, then, in the air? Nitrogen alone is a sufficient diluent of the necessary oxygen. Are these rare gases purposeless? I am intensely curious about them. Are there outcasts also among the elements? Are these gases dead elements? One of them, helium, is a transmuted emanation of

radium. Is it the ghost of radium? Nitrogen, with which they are found mechanically mingled, is the element of fermentation and decay. One feels upon the brink of a notable discovery. These dead gases, these ghosts of elements herding with the vapour of dissolution, nitrogen, cannot be entirely ineffective. I hazard this poetical suggestion:—It is the presence of these incommunicable elements that maintains the mechanical mixture of the oxygen and the nitrogen of the air: were their ghostly frontier eliminated, the two main members of the atmosphere would unite chemically, forming protoxide of nitrogen, which is laughing gas. Great Pan! How close we are to that rare old fantasy, that the crack of doom will be a universal shout of laughter!

The names, affinities and energies of the elements of which man consists should be more secure in every memory than the alphabet and the multiplication table. This is a great part of my immoralty, that, instead of a myth, children should be told, as soon as they begin to express their wonder, that they consist of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, kalium, natrium, sulphur, phosphorus, iron, magnesium, silicon; that the principal human elements are also the

principal constituents of the whole Universe, and that all the elements are forms of one substance. They should also be shown experimentally the qualities and properties of these elements; and gradually, instead of catechisms and the grammars of dead languages, obtain a knowledge of the poetry of evolution: a poetry that does not require to be taught or learnt; that requires only to be told and shown to be known, welcomed, and remembered, because it is already subconscious in the Matter of which we consist. Thus a child would know at once that there has been no philosophy, no religion, no literature hitherto; that there is nothing for him to learn; that every one must make for himself his own philosophy, religion, literature. All that chemists, astronomers, physicists, biologists, have discovered and suggested; all science and all its speculations—these things that do not require to be learnt, but only require to be shown to be known and delighted in, the child would soon furnish himself with; just as he would light-heartedly reject everything in the shape of system from Aristotle to Herbert Spencer, and all doctrine from Buddha to Christ, and from Christ to Nietzsche. The insane past of mankind is the incubus: the world is really a virgin world awaking from a bad dream.[1]

[1] "The Testament of a Man Forbid."

These are some of the seeds of the new thing I bring, of the new poetry which the world will make, Matter brooding on Matter for centuries to come. Poetry is the flower of what all men are maturing in thought and fancy; I reap a harvest as yet unsown; I come a hundred years before the time—that time foreseen by Wordsworth, "when what is now called science, familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on a form of flesh and blood."

It is a profoundly satisfying thought that no serious pursuit of man, no cherished conception, however erroneous in itself, is ever based in error. Man is Matter, embodied sincerity, and cannot for any length of time concern himself with what is not. I have shown a new thing—that Heaven and Hell were memories of processes of evolution struggling into consciousness; I have reminded the reader that astrology, alchemy, witchcraft, and sorcery had, all of them, roots in Material facts, and I have pointed out that these pseudo-sciences and black and white magics were attempts of unenlightened but conscious Matter to reveal itself and its powers. I will now state the Material sources of the stupendous ideas of God and Sin.

IV

GOD AND SIN

MAN is inhuman. Humanity is as fanciful an ideal as divinity. From eternity the Matter of which man consists had an unconscious being dissolved in the Ether; thereafter as lightning, and as various Material forms which we call elements: and as these various Material forms which we call elements, as lightning, and once again in the Ether, the Matter of which man consists will have an unconscious being to all eternity. I say an unconscious being: the likelihood that the Matter of man after its devolution into the Ether will again become conscious is inconsiderable. Further, in the event of so remote a chance, it is even more unlikely that the Matter of man, becoming conscious again, should have any recollection of its former consciousness. The present interlude of his conscious being—in the old image like the flight of a night-bird through an illumined hall from darkness to darkness—is so brief, that

on that account alone man has had no time to become human. This is true of the individual; and were mankind to end now, or a million years hence, it would also, and still, be true of the race. A million years of consciousness as man would not be an experience long and broad and deep enough to humanize the Matter of which man consists, because except in rare cases the same Matter is never more than once incarnate. From crops grown, and cattle fed, on battlefields, molecules of Matter that were once part of man may become part of man again. Doubtless also cannibals have eaten cannibals, thus giving the same Matter repeated avatars: an instance, however, that does not make for humanity. Even if our earth were to heap geological period upon geological period from our recent era of tertiary and quaternary times to a futurity of centenary and millenary ages, until in the course of a million million of years every electron of the globe transmuted through all forms of Matter, had been reincarnated as Man again and again, that would not be experience enough to fix a permanent memory of humanity in the devolved Matter of man: because this Matter that becomes man, like all Matter, existed from all eternity—during the immeasurable and inconceivable lapse of

eternity, existed in the Ether, thereafter as lightning, and as elements on fire, for periods compared with which a million million years are as the time of a single heart-beat compared with a million million years. Like thoughts of childhood in old age, the memory of the diaphanous light of the nebula and of the tumult and fire of its contraction, and the memory of the peace and darkness of its primeval, ethereal being, would overcome all impressions of consciousness in that unconscious memory which Matter is: and even if living experience remained occult in the oxygen and carbon, the hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium which had been man, the tumult and fire of the new nebula into which the Matter of man must devolve, will bray and burn out all sense of life in the most passionate Matter that ever lived and fought, the peace and darkness of the re-entered Ether, of the infinite Lethean Ether, will restore an entire and pure unconsciousness to the Matter which was Christ, to the Matter which was Nero, to the Matter which you are and which I am. It is a new poetry I bring, a new poetry for the first time in a thousand years: an abiding-place for the imagination of man as matter-of-fact, as hard and fast, as ineluctable as Olympus and Hades, Asgard and Hela, Heaven and Hell were for our

ancestors, and simpler and greater and more perdurable than these, because it is no longer a dream of the Universe, but the Universe itself, in which the imagination of man must now find its abode.

The Matter of man can never become human. A metaphysic or metaphor of man is of two terms:—Man is a Will to an impossible Divinity by way of an impossible Humanity. For four score years or five score, a heart-beat between the two eternities, some dozen elements are elected or doomed to consciousness as man: and to this consciousness is imparted by the manner of his generation an insignificant heritage of accumulated tendency, impulse and impression: so insignificant, within recorded time, that it may be ignored. It has been suggested that out of man, the descendant of a lower animal, something higher than man may be evolved. The suggestion does not commend itself to me. I know of no data that can make the Evolution of Species from three or four originals by Natural Selection a credible assumption. The age of miracles is past. When we ask for a sign we are referred to the evolution of a new species of louse. If any mortal thing, elephant or microscopic insect, is still unprovided, by all means let

it have its complement of lice: all-bounteous nature is not likely to be wanting in that department. That Matter should produce a new form of degenerate life in which it is especially prolific is no proof of the Evolution of Species by Natural Selection. The appearance of a new pedicular degraded-hemipterous insect in a hitherto inverminate habitat ensures certainly a due degree of phthiriasis where no phthiriasis was before—a consummation to rejoice the moral order of pediculina, and doubtless confirming the metaphysician of the parasitic world in his doctrine of the Universe as a Will to be Suctorial; but such an isolated phenomenon is not necessarily an illustration of the method of evolution, and might be called with greater probability an act of special creation. To me it is an instance of the material, poetic or imaginative style of Matter in its mood of depravity—a mood analogous to that in which literature produces Sinon, Tartuffe, Parolles, Chivy Slyme. A poetical metaphysic or metaphor is that of the Universe as Imagination becoming Phenomena. As in the Matter of a poet—nourished by the past, productive in the present, and sending forth aerial roots into the future—thoughts, imaginings, shapes, and legends of infinite variety, uncalled arise,

and unlaboured become; so in the Matter of the earth—which is Matter of the Universe, from all eternity to all eternity, which is all memory, all imagination, all energy—life in infinite variety arises and becomes: not by the breaking up of species, although that may be a side-show at the world's fair, but by the appearance of species the staple of evolution proceeds. If one speck or clot of protoplasm can arise and become, and after becoming, can evolve an organism, millions of specks of protoplasm can arise and become, each evolving a different organism, and the whole constituting an unbroken chain of being: not evolution in a straight line, but cubic evolution, a pullulation of species. Consider it: there must be similarities without any necessity for either lineal or collateral evolution, although these are both thrown in by exuberant nature: if the organisms are vertebrate, then they must all have backbones; if they are invertebrate they will be, all of them, without backbones; if the generation is viviparous the mother—plant or animal—will suckle her young; if the generation is oviparous the mother—plum-tree, grain, poultry, or spider—will produce eggs: but to suppose that a fish changes into a bird, and a bird into a beast by Natural Selection, as it is at present

understood, is to demand from man a credulity that could die a martyr's death to prove that the earth is flat. It is not a wanton mark of interrogation which I place against the Darwinian theory of the Origin of Species. What seems to me the subtle beginning of the one thing to be dreaded, a new anthropomorphism, demands resistance. On the threshold of Darwin's theory of the Evolution of Species by Natural Selection a danger-signal warns the jealous observer. The probability that allied species were descended from a common parent had sunk deeply into Darwin's mind; "but for some years," he writes, "I could not conceive how each form became so excellently adapted to its habits of life. I then began systematically to study domestic productions, and after a time saw clearly that *man's selective power was the most important agent.*" [1] The italics are mine. Man's selective power is the most important agent in the breeding of domestic animals, therefore an analogous selective power is exercised by nature! Darwin set himself to find out that this was true, with unexampled patience certainly, but with a rooted and ever-growing prepossession that what he sought was

[1] Darwin's Letter to Professor Haeckel of 8 October, 1864.

there, that he would discover his own anthropical notion in an ananthropic world. Is this not the inception of a new anthropomorphism? So men sought for God; so men hunted after witchcraft. Whatever we search for, we find; nothing is surer than that. We must, therefore, search without seeking for; we must desire to find, not an echo or reflection of our own thoughts, obtainable anywhere and at any time, but only that which is. With Darwin Natural Selection amounted to a metaphysic; it obsessed him with all the force of Other World; it explained the phenomena considered and so must be the cause of these phenomena! In human affairs circumstantial evidence is the most reliable, in the affairs of the Universe the most misleading, as all science, philosophy, and religion, directly attest. Natural Selection, sexual and vital, accounts for much variation, but it is not sufficient to bridge the gulf between the negro and the Teuton; to my mind it is not even sufficient to bridge the gulf between the Jew and the Gentile; and to trace man lineally through apes, marsupials, mudfish, skullless vertebrates, worms, and one-celled protozoa at twenty-five removes from the monera is to propound a thing my intellect and imagination reject. Environment, sexual inclination, and the

struggle for life, will not evolve a man from a rhizopod. Natural Selection, as it is understood, cannot be the full mechanism of the evolution of man. I want to know about the Chemical Selection; the difference between the elemental constitution of man and the other animals; the actual chemistry of animated Matter. Is there as much of the Universe in the tiger as in man? Is there an element of self-consciousness to be found only in man? A profound, a more Material Selection, a fate, a doom, is yet to be discovered. Although evolutionists insist that their Natural Selection is a mechanical process, like Darwin himself they feel that it is insufficient; they may not confess it to themselves, but they are sceptical. Scepticism being the parent of superstition, Natural Selection assumes the desired attributes, dynamic, theurgic. Natural Selection has usurped the thoughts of evolutionists as a thing behind phenomena, as a kind of god. The world is in danger of a new fanaticism, of a scientific instead of a religious tyranny. This is my protest. In the course of many ages the mind of man may be able to grasp the world scientifically: in the meantime we can know it only poetically; science is still a valley of dead bones till imagination breathes upon them.

It is certain that Matter has not evolved a finer race of men than the Caucasian; and it is certain that the Caucasian has not evolved a finer breed than the Greeks, the Romans or the English. Maugre the new louse—doubtless a most belated and strangely involved occurrence, comparable to our war of the Heptarchy in South Africa more than a thousand years behind the time — upon our earth the evolution of species has ceased, except tentatively by unnatural selection under the control of man. Unnatural is here a most relative term: I do not forget that man is himself as much a force of nature as a climate, or a season of the year, or any other environment. Since in the Caucasian races of men Matter has become capable of full self-consciousness, although it has not attained it yet, no further evolution of life in an ascending scale is possible; therefore man cannot become more human than he is. A fuller self-consciousness will not achieve a greater humanity: on the contrary, as I intend to show, a fuller self-consciousness entails a deeper integration, a closer involution of man's inhumanity.

Man is inhuman, and cannot be other than inhuman, the metaphysic or metaphor illustrative being—The Universe as a Will to an impossible

Divinity by way of an impossible Humanity. The skeleton of man is a most inhuman thing; a skull is most inhuman; bones are as inhuman as rocks. The flesh of man is inhuman; it is not distinguishable from the flesh of swine. His sight, hearing, taste, appetites, functions, are inhuman, being appropriaments of all mammalia. Four important things he has which, by their quality, differentiate him from the other animals —his thumb, his posture, his brain, and his larynx; and these, the insignia of man, are the special vehicles of a most profound inhumanity for which the catfish and the wolverine, were they in power, would wipe the present lord of creation from the face of the earth as utterly unfit to live. His commanding posture, his opposable thumb, his spacious convoluted brain, and his voice of terror and command, have enabled man to invent, elaborate, and apply to man all the tortures of his imagined Hell. The cat plays with the mouse, but that is the feline culinary art; and the mouse is shortly killed. Nor is the mouse fastened; it has to the last a chance of escape; and often the mouse gets away after a rousing game in which the stake was its life. The spider weaves a web, and the insect is caught; here the prey is fastened,

but it is for food, and often a stout fly will break the net, and at the worst he is soon despatched. It was man who conceived the exquisite idea of fastening people in order to hurt them at his will and pleasure. Not a mammoth cat, insane and hunger-clung, ties up men and flogs them underground to cook them quickly instead of employing the longer, less brutal, and customary method with the mouse: it is man who does this to man, and not for food, but upon principle. Not a Titanic spider, but man, rove the strappado and stretched the rack in order to hurt men in body, mind, and soul, in every organ, nerve and sinew, joint and muscle, repeatedly and for long periods without killing them: it was man who did this, and not because he was starving and this the only way to secure and prepare food, but in many cases only because there was between him and his victims a difference of opinion upon an entirely immaterial point. It was not a pack of wolves, having captured more game than they could dispose of, and being quite sated with flesh and wanton with blood, who chained up men and women and burned them alive: it was men who did this to men as a religious duty. As soon as their queen has been pleased, and the future of the hive is assured, the

working-bees destroy the drones. If merciful economy be a human attribute, the bees are more human than men. Those who cannot work, and those for whom there is nothing to do, the natural and artificial drones among men, are interned in lunatic asylums, homes for incurables, prisons, poorhouses. The cost of these would, I suppose, provide old-age pensions for all the workers. The lethal chamber of the bee is the porch of his straw-built citadel. Recently a humane man of science, with courage and public spirit—so rare in England now !—inquired for the lethal chambers of men. These are they: our asylums, prisons, poor-houses; but the death we supply is slow—so slow: why, one pleasant meal of five courses, with wine, coffee, benedictine, and a cigar, would in one night dispose of all the old men in a certain *Home* I know: indeed, they are living tombs rather than lethal chambers, these institutions of ours. Among the bees it is the queens and drones, among the ants the queens and kings, non-workers in both cases, who produce the drudges and the soldiers. The proletariate of the hive and of the cities of the emmet are more human than men; they do not propagate their order: proletariate is really a discourtesy title applied to working-bees and

ants. In the hive and the ant-hill the proletaneous order is the upper class: no slave begets a slave among these swarming miracles. From ancient times the working-bees and the working-ants, seeing that the endless all-absorbing drudgery has to be done, gradually evolved, by heroic human abstinence, their own sexlessness, leaving to the idle classes the rapture, the sin, and the awful responsibility of producing slaves: the humanity of the bees and ants, class and mass, approaches divinity. Among men the idle and well-to-do classes, instead of producing the workers and the soldiers, limited themselves of old to the reproduction of their own order, the males merely as an entertainment making sporadic incursions into the colonies of the workers. Now, even reproduction of their own order, in France, America, and more recently in England, begins to be irksome to the idle and well-to-do classes; but instead of an honest, honourable, and human abstinence, they adopt a dishonest, dishonourable, and brutal artifice: nor have they any real idea of regulating the future of the human race: it is only to keep their own circumstances easy and the tide of pleasure flowing: this custom is also extending, not so inhumanly, to the proletariate. With the majority of animals,

so far as they themselves are concerned, all the seeds of life have fair play: and in the order of mammalia a beautiful, a human chastity has been evolved which restricts to a brief annual occurrence the nisus towards the future of their kind, such inhuman animals as men, monkeys, and cats excepted: with the exception of women also the females of all mammalia are human; they suckle their young. The asceticism of the asexual worker and soldier ants, the divinest thing in nature, had at one time an analogue of a kind in our monasteries, nunneries, and orders of military monks: that was the deadlift effort mankind made to attain an impossible Divinity by way of an impossible Humanity; and it was only a further dehumanization of the individual without any evolutionary result: man is much too Material a being ever to compass so human, so divine an event as the generation of sexless beings to do the necessary drudgery of the world as devoutly as lovers kiss: his ideal eunuch of the monastery, and his actual eunuch of the seraglio are overwhelming proof of man's profound inhumanity and of the abysmal indivinity of his nature.

Man's consciousness of his inhumanity and indivinity are transmuted in his uninstructed

imagination into the monstrous phantom—Sin; something so heinous and detestable interpenetrating all his being, works and ways, that many of the subtlest intelligences and most upright minds have found no relief from its remorseful obsession except in the atonement of Christ and faith in an immaterial future; or, more courageously, in a remorseless despair and the resolute acceptance of the postulate that life is a thing that should never have been. It has been left to me to show that this inhumanity, this indivinity, this Sin, has, like all man's ideas, conceptions, and fantasies, a Material source in the properties of the forms of Matter of which man consists. In expounding my new poetry I am at an immense disadvantage in one regard—that the latent forces of expansion and chemical affinity, the active electrical, magnetic, radiant and cohesive energies, and the perpetuity of molecular and interatomical motions in the oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, etc., of the Matter of man are as yet only vaguely conceived, so far at least as they relate to himself, in the mind of the reader. I must therefore reiterate that these forces, converted into anabolic and katabolic activities, into vitality, nervous energy, reproductive power, into love, hate, thought, imagination, into conscious-

ness and self-consciousness, are the fount of man's notion that there is within him, and without, something other than Matter and its properties of form and energy: it is these material forces that man has ignorantly christened soul or spirit, with the immaterial significance of these words. Now no one in love feels sinful; no one in a passion of any kind feels sinful; no man gloriously drunk feels sinful; no deep-set ambition ever accuses itself of sin; an entirely healthy nature living a healthy life knows nothing of sin. Conviction of Sin has always been a limited experience. There have been, are, and will be, powerful and most Material natures, unaffected except temporarily and superficially by bouts of debauchery, prolonged mental strain, and the commission of every crime. Conviction of Sin, alike in the offspring of worn-out stock—epileptics, consumptives, neuropaths, mattoids, weak-bodied and weak-minded people generally—as in ordinary healthy natures, is the effect of the exhaustion of the Material forces of the Matter of man. The exhaustion may proceed from dissipation, from prolonged domestic or financial worry, or—not to multiply instances—it may be the result of the enormous discharge of nervous energy and the upheaval of the whole

nature in the commission of a murder or the betrayal of a friend. But no ordinary, healthy man is ever convicted of Sin before the act, or in the act; the degenerate whose normal state is one of conscious sinfulness, feels for the moment deified upon the sudden access of energy that leads him into crime; and the outcast, when he learns to say, "Evil, be thou my good," stumbles, although unconsciously, upon the tremendous knowledge that the categoric imperative is the discharge of the material forces of Matter, whether the discharge be by the lightnings of the clouds, in the seismal throes of earth, or through the passion and imagination of men and women. Sin, then, is the exhaustion of the material forces of man. Discharges of force in ways of pleasure, in moods of delight, in trances of ecstasy, as well as discharges of force in feelings of rancour, jealousy, and malice, in deeds of lust, slaughter, and treachery, have alike to bear the unhallowed name of the succeeding reaction. It is a species of vengeance, this transference of the title Sin from the impotence of the spent Matter to the energy that was expended. The degenerate suffers because his forefathers used up the energies of the stock in enjoyment; the debauchee suffers by the over-discharge of his

own force; and both feel a vengeful pleasure in transferring the moral nickname of their enfeebled condition to the innocent, whole-hearted liberty and power of the days of exuberant health. It is the meanest, most cowardly thing man has done to call his courage Sin: by this vengeance the enfeebled Matter of man obtains such pitiful satisfaction as an infant does when it calls the floor upon which it has broken its brow "bad," and invites its nurse to whip the offender. An apologue:—A bee, seized with an access of Quixotic daring, exhausted its sting in the neck of a quite harmless tourist, and shortly lay buzzing its last and lamenting its guilt. "What a sinner I have been!" the bee buzzed. A hornet flounced up and asked the bee what ailed it. "I have sinned," the bee replied, "and deserve only death and hell." "Let's see," cried the hornet, examining the bee; "why, you've no sting! You've used up your sting!" "Ay!" sighed the bee; "I've used it up, sinner that I am!" "Pooh!" replied the hornet, who was by way of being a casuist: "that's not how to look at it! Your sting, look you—your sting itself was the sin. Now, you are purged of that. *Courage, mon camarade, le diable est mort!*" "Whatever do you mean?" rejoined the bee. "When I was active and

happy, confident and proud, with the power of life and death in my tail, going about the delightful business of the universe among the amorous flowers——" "Then you were sinful," interrupted the hornet, determined that his cousin should not die unconsoled: "now, since by the loss of your sting, which was your sin *par excellence*, you being sexless, you are convicted of sin, and have become penitent, your sin ceases, and you will go to heaven." But the bee in the sudden illumination of death whispered faintly but resolutely, "No, by heaven, and earth, and hell! None of your tricks on travellers bound for the undiscovered country. It was not until I lost my power to sin that I felt sinful; therefore I was never a sinner, and I'm not a sinner now." Whereupon the bee with a last effort flew into the bosom of a rose and died happy.

I now come to the Material source of the idea of God.

The Ether from which everything was evolved fills all space: it interpenetrates all Matter so intimately that the electrons of an atom swim in it with the liberty of fish in the sea. The Ether has never been analysed, quantitatively, qualitatively, or volumetrically; it has never been seen, heard, smelt, felt, tasted, or weighed.

A mathematician has suggested that the Ether is the unimaginable world of four dimensions, including, interpenetrating and transcending our cognizable Universe as a cube which is a world of three dimensions includes and transcends a possible world of two dimensions contained in a superficial square. Certain, if a world of two dimensions can exist, a world of four dimensions is not impossible; but we require to complete the series with a linear world of one dimension and a punctual world of none, which is absurd.

Nevertheless, it is possible to form some idea of the nature of the Ether. Its invisibility is not beyond our conception: this negative quality is characteristic of many fluids, notably of the atmosphere; but the atmosphere becomes apparent in the object-glass of the telescope when the moon is seen like a white pebble in a rushing stream. The imponderability of the Ether can also be conceived by analogy with the atmosphere. Every man, knowing nothing of it, carries upon his shoulders a column of air sixty miles high and weighing many tons. In calm weather the very presence of this voluminous vapour is unfelt: it is only when the wind rises that we know how heavy its hand can be. Thus a poetical or concrete conception of the Ether is not negatived by

that which it is not. But this omnipresent substance can be conceived positively, and the most suitable analogue is the sea. The sea consists of two gases—hydrogen and oxygen, united chemically to form water, and containing in solution two or three hundred grains to the pint of compounds of the following forms of Matter: Kalium, natrium, magnesium, calcium, sulphur, carbon, chlorine, bromine, iodine, and traces of everything soluble and partially soluble in water: it contains also, dissolved in various salts and bases, the very elements, hydrogen and oxygen, of which it is itself compounded. If a fluid so simple as water, braided of only three molecules of Matter, two of hydrogen and one of oxygen, can be so powerful a solvent, it follows that a fluid so complex as the Ether, woven and interwoven of molecules of all the elements, that is, of molecules of every form of Matter, must be dynamic in the highest degree, must be an omnipotent solvent: if water, consisting of only two elements, can hold in solution, besides its own constituents, ten or a dozen other elements, the Ether, consisting of all the elements, *a fortiori* can hold in solution all these elements. Nor is the actual omnipresence of the Ether altogether beyond our grasp. To say that every electron, every atom, every molecule, every ele-

ment or form of Matter, every planet, sun, and system, floats in the Ether and is interpenetrated by it, is to say that which seems improbable; but the analogy of water again helps to a natural concrete image. To say that three-quarters by weight of human flesh, three-eighths by weight of human bones, consist of water, is to say that which seems improbable, but which is nevertheless true. Thus we can guess the Ether in terms of our Universe of three dimensions.

The esoteric nature of the Ether is more easily understood. I use the word "esoteric" with my own meaning, implying nothing mystical. By esoteric I mean here a thing known only to me. Upon the publication of this book, the thing I am about to tell becomes exoteric. I *make* no mystery. The Universe is all mystery: the existence of a drop of water is as mysterious as the existence of music.

Man is the Universe alive and conscious, and with the capacity of entire self-consciousness. This capacity, undeveloped and misunderstood, is the source of all man's misery, the hotbed of the idea of Sin and the idea of God. Unable to comprehend it, the Greek and the Norseman projected their trouble into Olympus and Hades, Asgard and Nifelheim, gods and goddesses, titans,

giants, furies, valkyrs. Every people cast out and projected its self-consciousness as Other World in some form. A unique race, the Jews, threw its shadow on the Universe as Jehovah, the One God, jealous, vengeful, inhuman. The European Aryans laid hold of this, but in a decadent, Christianized form; and as they lacked in general the intense individuality of the Hebrew, they soon brought it into a deliquescence of the Trinity, the Mother of Heaven, Saints, transubstantiation, the God of love, etc. The hardier northern races, however, reverted to a more Hebraic form, preferring the God of battles to the Madonna; and withal the idea of the One God remained dominant in Christian countries, being recruited by the sudden rise and rivalry of Islam, with its strident profession of monotheism.

The material source of this uneasy self-consciousness which projects itself into Other World is twofold. One of these is the Nature of Man, formerly called Original Sin, God and Sin being in this regard convertible terms. I have stated this source clearly enough in the "Prime Minister," in that passage where the protagonist overcomes the desire to pray, conjuring himself to—

> "think
> Instead what God is, sanely think; and what
> The sanguine source of our immortal hope;

Think how some common drudging neighbour-wight
(Not Hercules nor a titan of the war
Venerean ; no, but any honest Jack)
Could happily beget for fifty years
A hundred wholesome children annually :
How every rosy Jill encloisters germs
Of many thousand brats ; think this and laugh
Aloud, delighted with the naïve, the rich
Conceit of immortality and vast
Exuberance of the race that swells and throbs
In every man and woman, strings the nerves,
Ignites the brain and thunders in the heart
With God and life eternal."

The other source of the idea of God is in the Ether. I have not yet dealt with this by name in any of my writings, and had intended to reserve it for my "Testament of a Deliverer"; but having elected to prepare a brief and general account of my message, I must at least mention it here. My statement of the Ethereal source of the idea of God is not nearly mature yet. Nevertheless, the idea is simple and clear; it is indeed self-evident. Every molecule of which man consists is not only saturated in the all-pervading Ether, but is kneaded of it, visible, ponderable Matter being a condensation of the invisible, imponderable Ether. In a last analysis, which takes us back to the first synthesis, man is therefore the Ether become conscious. It is not a question of bulk. Man is an inhabitant of the earth, which

is one of the smallest planets of one of the smallest systems in the Universe; but man consists of the Universe, of the whole Universe in its condensed form, and also of the whole Universe in its invisible, imponderable form, being permeated and pervaded by the omnipotent, omnipresent Ether, being soaked in it, being drunk with it, being it. There is nothing anywhere higher than man; there can be nothing higher than the Universe become self-conscious. In his uninstructed time man called the Ether which permeates him, which is his ecstasy, God and gods: "Out of God he came," he thought; "and back to God he should return;" or he called it Nirvana and an infinite peace. Imagination is the radiation of the omnipotent Ether. Only the whole Universe become conscious could have imagined God the Creator. Now man knows that there is no God; that nothing was made; that all is a becoming; that he is the Ether, condensed, evolved; and that he will devolve again into that invisible, imponderable form of Matter: and this knowledge inherent in himself is infinitely satisfying. All the imaginings about the source of his being which man has maddened over, which he has clung to in good report and ill, which he has died for in battle and at the stake, have their

roots in Material truth. The idea of the Trinity, for example, is clearly the effort of the Universe become conscious in man to express that visible and invisible being and that power, namely, Ether, Matter, Energy, which we now know to be the triple form of the Universe; and the sublime idea of the Immaculate Conception has the same profound significance as the union of the gods with the daughters of men in all mythologies; it means that man procreates something more than man; it means that he procreates a conscious Universe. I think it unlikely that Matter has become conscious anywhere else than on our earth. In man the Ether and the principal forms of Matter are conscious and self-conscious. It is not conceivable that some other dozen elements might become conscious; Matter cannot imagine life and consciousness without carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, phosphorus. It is not necessary that other elements should become conscious, because every element is a form of the one substance: therefore in man the whole Universe is conscious. I should say that there is not now, that there has not been at any time, a mate or a peer of man; and—I repeat it once more—there cannot be anything higher than man, because man is the whole

Universe become conscious and self-conscious. This is a great thing: it is the greatest thing that has been told to the world. It will destroy all existing religions, governments, institutions, morality and all moralities, all philosophy, all literature, all art. It puts an end to man's mistaken effort towards an impossible Divinity by way of an impossible Humanity: he will leave that henceforth to the bees and the ants; he is higher than the bees and the ants; he is more Material than they. But that prolonged, deadlift agony towards an impossible Divinity by way of an impossible Humanity sprang, like all man's travail, from a Material truth. Man's aim at something higher than man meant that there is nothing anywhere higher than man. There *is* nothing anywhere higher than man. The terror and splendour of this will give the world pause; nor will the world yield to it easily, for here is an actual new-birth at last: to know that there can be no first cause, no metaphysic; that there can be no Other World; that man is the Material Universe become conscious. A thousand years' war would not be too terrible a travail for the birth of the world's self-consciousness: thereafter man could be and do something; heretofore he has been and done nothing.

GOD AND SIN

The generative power of man and the all-pervading Ether, conscious in him, are the Material sources of the idea of God. From the first source there comes also the idea of Sin cognate and isomeric with the idea of God. (The Devil, the personification of God as Sin, has been so long a joke that he is out of court.) These twin ideas God and Sin died together on Calvary two thousand years ago. The history of Christendom is the history of the obsequies of these ideas, of the devolution of these ideas.[1] Out of Matter the Myth of God and Sin and Heaven and Hell arose. Return that myth in which the imagination of Christendom still dwells in all serious moods and times of passion, return it to its Material source, and let the world's imagination go with it and be born again, to live no longer in a myth but in the Universe itself. I say, with the Prime Minister, let

> "the passionate heart of man,
> The proud imagination and the dream
> That hovers homeless as the myths decay,
> Exempt from fabulous wonder, rooted deep
> In Substance one and multiform, and breathed
> In all the mystery of the things that are,
> Create indomitable will to truth,

[1] "The Testament of a Prime Minister," pp. 76–81.

An open mind at home in space and time,
A stainless memory splendidly endowed
With actual knowledge, a Material soul
At one with the Material Universe."

With the Bishop of St. James's I watch the future, an actual world wherein an actual man shall be and do greatly

"In majesty Material, the Nessus-shirt
Of spirit, warp and woof of legend, dyed
In many-coloured Sin, the mordant shame
That cankered life, and clung, a grafted hide
About his innocent flesh, fallen off, or flayed
With hideous woe, and in its proper filth
Corrupted into naught. Forthwith the world
Begins again, not even a pallid dream
Of legendary pasts to cloud the dawn.
I say it simply :—With the Universe
Man clothes himself ; arrayed in time and space
In darkness and in light, no lamp, no gleam
He follows, for the sun illumines him
And every sun his kinsmen in the skies,
The systems, constellations, galaxies.
At home in the empyrean, issuing thence,
His free imagination momently
Remembers flame pellucid, which it was
And will be in the nebula again
When all the orbs that stock the loins of night
Return into the sun, and fill with seed
Of chastest fire the impassioned womb of space."

To conclude for the present: Whence is the Universe and Why? The Universe itself is the

only answer to these questions. Whence is the Universe? There is no whence; it fills space. Why is the Universe? It cannot tell: it is neither necessary nor unnecessary: it is. There are, properly, no answers to these questions; therefore these questions are not. The Universe says always and only, "Here and Now."

THE THEATROCRAT

A TRAGIC PLAY OF CHURCH AND STAGE

"This is the freedom of the Universe"
WORDSWORTH

PERSONS

SIR TRISTRAM SUMNER	*Proprietor and Manager of the Grosvenor Theatre.*
GERVASE SACKVILLE	*Bishop of St. James's.*
WARWICK GROOM	*Actors.*
SILAS ORCHARD	
MARK BELFRY	*An American Manager.*
HILDRETH	*Sir Tristram's Secretary.*
ABBOT	*Business Manager.*
SALERNE	*Stage Manager.*
BLYTH	*Commissionaires.*
BOULDER	
TEMPLE	*Sir Tristram's Dresser.*
ROUSE	*Call-boy.*
TWO DOCTORS	
LADY SUMNER	*Sir Tristram's Wife.*
EUROPA TROOP	*An Actress.*

Actors, Scene-shifters, Property-men.

SCENE: *London.* TIME: *The Present.*

A month elapses between the third and fourth Acts.

THE THEATROCRAT

ACT I

SCENE: *Sir Tristram Sumner's study in his house in Piccadilly.* SIR TRISTRAM *is reading an old letter. When the door opens he puts the letter hastily in his pocket.*

Enter LADY SUMNER.

Sir T. Martha! You've come to trouble me; your eyes
Are lustreless and evil. Will it end
At all? Will you give over urging death?
Lady S. A visitor.
Sir T. Who is it?
Lady S. Warwick Groom.
Sir T. Impossible: at any time impossible.
I hate him, Martha.
Lady S. Hate? Hate Warwick Groom!
I thought you hated no one.
Sir T. So did I!
But him I hate; because—he was my friend.
Lady S. And would be still.
Sir T. Therefore I hate him more!
But that's not true: hate fathoms hate, and answers
Index-like, the searching current of its thought,

Down through the earth, or round it in the nerveless
Air. Deep he hates me; by my hate I know.
I tell you, Martha, were Warwick Groom and I
Alone together for an hour, the death
Of either or of both would testify
Our rooted rancour.

Lady S. I cannot understand!
True, he is wild, this Warwick Groom of ours,
And doors are shut against him; but a braver
Artist starves not anywhere.

Sir T. Starves? Let him starve.

Lady S. This is so new, so sudden, Tristram!

Sir T. No;
Nothing is sudden that the heart brings forth.
The mushroom spawn of passing loves and hates
By thunder-showers and puddles quickly bred,
To rot as quickly, in sequestered nooks
Or by the trodden highways, are nothing—nothing
But rashes on the skin.

Lady S. You change the figure:
The very rhapsody of Warwick Groom!

Sir T. Plastic as molten metal! Living hate
Mine is, a deeply struck deliberate cancer
In the heart, and half as old as I: half
Of my life it is: I know it now mature
That knew it not a-growing: wholesome hate!
A wholesome cancer, a resourceful pain,
A fount of passion!

Lady S. You forget yourself;
For now you stare and pant like some insane
Unhappy woman, sick with jealousy,
Her strangled voice and prayer, "Oh, just to crush

"My rival like a flea!"

Sir T. So would I do!

Lady S. I cannot understand you.

Sir T. I understand.

We know each other, Warwick Groom and I.
No legendary friendship ever wove
The lives of men in such a gallant web
As ours displayed: the secrets of our hearts
Were interchanged like goodly gifts that made
The giver and receiver ache with joy:
Our thoughts, our deeds, our sins were known and loved
Of either; nothing irksome, trivial, dull
Could happen day or night to him or me
Since telling of it gave it import, grave
Or humorous, subtle, sweet, or sad. Too well,
Too infinitely well we knew each other!
Grudge, longing, foible, vanity, conceit,
Ambition, terror, cowardice, fancy, whim
Revealed themselves in either's consciousness
Beyond the scope and verge of comely minds,
That there might still be something to confide,
Some proof of new affection: once, at least,
Two men should know each other inside out!
To cut and carve a specimen, a corpse,
A limbless, headless trunk, malodorous, foul,
O'er-hacked, o'er-handled by anatomists,
Tyros and demonstrators, makes a job
Cleaner than knowing truly inside out
The heart of man, the actual heart of man,
Not in a general mass of studies culled
From books, but in particular, one's friend.

Had fortune not divided us I know
Both had gone mad. He hates the thought of me,
As I the thought of him—the natural end
Of every intimacy pushed outside
The limit. Souls are clad and should be seen
In vestments only: things and thoughts there are
We must not think: forbidden is the tree
Of knowledge still to those that love themselves,
Their friends, their art, their people and the world.
This is a righteous hate in him and me.

Lady S. It desolates my heart to think it true!
What shall I say to him?

Sir T. Give him some food,
Some drink, some money.

Lady S. But he comes with news!
Oh, I forgot; you moved me so! Your Troilus,
It seems, is ill.

Sir T. Ah; so. He looked consumptive.
The under-study is letter-perfect.

Lady S. Yes;
But think: the first of such a play—so harsh,
So questionable.

Sir T. Interest follows Troilus:
This is a blow; but not a deadly one.

Lady S. And fortune's blows may prove caresses.
Warwick
Can play the part.

Sir T. Groom? In my theatre? Martha!

Lady S. I once had leave to counsel you, though now
You shun me, Tristram——

Sir T. Martha!

Lady S. Yes, you do;

And take the mind of every one but me.
Tristram, you know my heart. Is it unclean
Like Warwick Groom's? You loved me once: has love
Fermented, like your friendship, into hate?

Sir T. Should not a woman's heart escape the probe
Men search each other with, the fathom line,
The dredge, the sunken shaft that brings to light
No pearls of price, no gems, nor golden ore,
But wreck and rust, drowned hopes and dead men's bones?

Lady S. There's terror in your mind: terror for me,
And terror for yourself!—But this is vain.—
I think that help has come; I yet may live.
The play, the play! No question Warwick Groom
Is Troilus to the accent. Have you lost
Your love of art along with other loves?

Sir T. Martha!

Lady S. Forgive me that.—Europa Troop:
It's not for love, the world and I know well,
You tossed her Cressida. The wanton salt
Of her, so loathsome to a passionate mind,
Is admirable here; and art demands
This sacrifice besides, since it may be—
That you should give the hated Warwick Groom
A part predicting him, so like a glove
It fits him.

Sir T. Let me think; and you—think you:
Will "Troilus and Cressida" succeed?

Lady S. I think it will; if you salute what chance
Provides, a perfect Troilus.

Sir T. Do you feel
The fit upon you—your telepathic mood?

Lady S. I hardly know: I think the play is safe.
Sir T. If Groom plays Troilus?
Lady S. If Groom plays Troilus.
Sir T. You say he knows the part. How can that be?
Lady S. That you must ask him.
Sir T. Martha!
Lady S. Fate—it's fate.
Sir T. What's his condition? Is he well put on? Drunk—sober—maudlin? How?
Lady S. Sober and trim; Pallid and beautiful.
Sir T. You loved him once.
Lady S. Tristram!
Sir T. I mean, he was in love with you.
Lady S. You knew that from the first.
Sir T. But never knew If you loved him.
Lady S. You never asked me that!
Sir T. It never troubled me; nor does it now:
But every question that a man may put,
Or may not put a woman, shapes itself
Some time or other; and the chastest mind,
When love begins to mellow, and passion falls,
A ripened friendship from the tree of life,
Thinks of his wife one time at least, "*had* I
Her maidenhead?"
Lady S. Tristram!
Sir T. The word escaped.
Lady S. Oh, you are crude and cruel! But I am for you:—
Not every husband; some men marry widows;

Some marry harlots; some——

Sir T. Yes; some?

Lady S. It seems
Some marry virgins and are none the wiser.

Sir T. That's not like dying.

Lady S. No. And Warwick Groom?

Sir T. Yes; but remain. Not him alone with me.

Lady S. There's something in your mind more than you say.

Sir T. Without a doubt. No man can speak his mind.

Lady S. But every woman can, I think.

Sir T. And does?

Lady S. If she be gently asked.

Sir T. What shall I ask?

Lady S. Ask? Anything. But you are harassed, ill. Let me conclude with Groom.

Sir T. No; bring him in.

[SIR TRISTRAM *at the telephone communicates with his business manager,* ABBOT, *while* LADY SUMNER *goes out and re-enters with* WARWICK GROOM.

Groom. Tristram!

Sir T. [*At the telephone*] Warwick!—old friend! (No, Abbot; wait.)

Groom. You'll give me this?

Sir T. You know the part?

Groom. I know it.

Lady S. We'll test him, Tristram.

[*Takes up a copy of* Troilus and Cressida.

Sir T. Shame! (Yes? Sumner. No. A dozen Heidsieck? Yes, at once; from me.

Send him my love ; tell him he shall get well.)
You never played it ?
Groom. No ; I studied it
When you announced the play a year ago ;
And when you placed it in rehearsal——
Sir T. Yes ;
You wrote me, I remember.
Groom. And received
No answer.
Lady S. Tristram !
Sir T. Hateful oversight !
Forgive me, Warwick. Having cast the part,
Not knowing you were free . . . (Yes. Sumner. What?
Yes ; let the understudy dress. No. Yes.
Perhaps we'll have another Troilus. Groom.
To-night. Oh no ! I think. A great success.)
Lady S. And now I'll test him.
Sir T. Women are merciless !
Lady S. And that's the cue ! I speak for Hector, Warwick.
"Unarm thee, go ; and doubt thou not, brave boy,
"I'll stand to-day for thee and me and Troy."
Groom. "Brother, you have a vice of mercy in you
"Which better fits a lion than a man."
Lady S. "What vice is that, good Troilus ? Chide me for it."
Groom. "When many times the captive Grecians fall,
"Even in the fan and wind of your fair sword,
"You bid them rise and live."
Lady S. "O, 'tis fair play !"
Groom. "Fool's play"—I'll not go on, for I have asked

Like courteous mercy, Tristram.

Sir T. You have brought
Mercy to us, boy—a Troilus unmatched
From swift Scamander to the lordly Thames.

Groom. Then am I happy. Tristram, Martha, years
How many have I wasted; ten, a dozen,
Despairing up and down the railways, caught
And imprisoned, like some adventurer
Forlorn, in dreary tunnels, stations, inns,
Provincial companies and theatres,
The dismallest labyrinth where every step
Stumbles at skeletons of dead ambitions
And dying reputations; as close to London
As the suburbs are, further away, that is,
Than hell from heaven, and bitterer than hell.
Be hung upon the fringe of paradise,
Stewing in brimstone with the spicy scent
Of asphodel to lave the sulphurous air,
And envy Tantalus his pleasant lines
For ever and a day!

Sir T. You keep your zest
Of talk, your thunder and lightning.

Groom. Let me talk——
A minute! It's a dozen lifetimes since
We met. The luck of some! the luck! Old gag,
The luck! It seems but yesterday that I
Beheld the Parthenon, one towering wave
Of wild delight from stalls to gallery, break
At my feet, the vanguard of a tide
Of triumph, governed by the moon of hearts,
The world's applause, that should have borne me on
To the trade winds and harbours of success.

One season—only one in London town!
Two failures after, and with finer parts
Than that that seemed to place me, cast me out
Provincial and suburban derelict.
Nightly to play upon the blood and brain
Of London!—Tristram! Martha!—On the best,
Most beautiful and bravest folk on earth!—
Ah, let them sneer that fail! I never fail
Although I seem to, for I love the world,
And all that's in it, and what's best I love
The best!—To play on London's sense and heart
With passion and emotion, tears and flame,
Laughter and anguish, terror, splendour, might—
As you do, Tristram, and as I could do:
Is there vocation, mission, martyrdom
That equals it? Oh, every night to act
A part of power, and feel a thousand hearts
Beat stroke for stroke with yours, in heaven, in hell,
In London—nowhere else!—in London town,
The core of the world: ten years of that—three—one,
Then any death in rags and hospitals,
Garrets and dens and drunkenness, disgraced,
Forgotten, but my inmost will achieved!

Sir T. Your pulses hum with youth, and scarce two years
Between us!

Lady S. Scarce a year!

Groom. And that makes less
Than nothing 'twixt the tropics where we are,
The equatorial forties.

Sir T. Less than nothing.

Lady S. This, then, is Troilus, Tristram?

Sir T. Troilus? Yes!
Off to the theatre; dress; rehearse all day,
And fire the town at night.
Groom. I'll play the part
As ne'er I played! Thanks from my soul, deep thanks,
Tristram and Martha. Till the call-boy calls!
[*Goes out.*
Sir T. Still more excitable, more frenzied. Not——?
Lady S. Oh, no! the febrile genius of the man.
Some wine he had from me, so worn he seemed:
One glass; it lit him like a torch,
Sir T. [*At the telephone*] (Yes. Groom:
He takes the part. My great regret express
To all the principals, because to-day
I break their well-earned rest: pick out your words:
Summon them promptly to rehearse with Groom.
What? Surely. Fifty. See him when he comes.
No; extra: mornings, extra. Tut! I can't give less.
Yes; keep the understudy under arms.
Myself? At three. Box-office; libraries?
That's good . . . Ah! . . . Dubious: time will tell.)
Booked for a week, and there it stops!
Lady S. Oh, Tristram!
Let me see! [*She presses one hand to her eyes and grasps the copy of "Troilus and Cressida" tightly in the other.*] Clear! Yes; if Groom plays Troilus!
Sir T. If Groom plays——
Lady S. Hush! Again I see and hear!
[*Throws away the book and uncovers her eyes.*
Psychic, or magic, out of heaven or hell
That message comes: "If Warwick Groom plays Troilus."

Sir T. It rings with menace.
Lady S. Terror! Should we fail?—
Oh, we are ruined, Tristram!
Sir T. Once for all!
That I am facing.
Lady S. They will help you yet!
Sir T. Not now. Failure to-night begins the end.
My personal triumph and the theatre's
Cannot be questioned——
Lady S. Who would dare!
Sir. T. But debt
Increases like a tide when sun and moon
Uplift the mass of waters and the west
Scourges the huge Atlantic. Now you laugh:
That's best. My guarantors withdraw their names
To-night, if failure knells the curtain down.
Lady S. Tristram!—our own account!—that's overdrawn!
Sir T. And overdrawn again!
Lady S. The tragedy!
The only tragedy! The end of love,
The loss of children, snuffing out of hope,
Decay of soul is happiness itself
Beside the want of means—with our desires,
Experience, fancies, dreams.
Sir T. Yes, but you laughed;
And you must laugh again and yet again.
Why, Martha, with a roof above our heads,
A crust to eat, we will be what we are,
The essence of ourselves, in every fate.
Lady S. Live poor again? Not for a moment, Tristram!

No man can be himself in poverty,
Nor woman either: all the world knows that,
And sweats and aches and lies and sins for wealth.
No, Tristram; but the old deliverance.
Sir T. What?
Lady S. [*Takes a vial from her pocket*] This, that so often set our hearts at rest.
Sir T. Have I not told you never to show me that?
Lady S. Yes; but I show it. Is your courage gone?
Are you afraid to look upon the past?
Sir T. What purpose can it serve?
Lady S. It eases me
To talk of it. Do you remember, Tristram?
Sir T. What ghouls you are, you women! What hyenas,
Digging for ever in the past!
Lady S. Have *you*
Forgotten? Is your memory such a sieve?
Sir T. No! I remember many heady times
When although fortune scowled and fate undid
Our utmost toil, yet love and tranquil sleep
Fulfilled the night with this beneath our pillow,
And certain death at any moment ours.
Lady S. And always then the sombre clouds dispersed,
And fate began to build us up again.
Sir T. We slept together . . .
Lady S. Yes . . .
Sir T. Well, we shall see.
Lady S. [*Takes up the book of the play and covers her eyes again*] I see the theatre—what was Warwick's brag?—

One tidal wave of wild humanity
From stalls to gallery, surging at your feet,
If Warwick Groom plays Troilus? Why that "if"?
Sir T. There's menace there!
Lady S. Why can't I hear it say,
"*Since* Warwick Groom plays Troilus"? . . . Can't we die
At once? If you would only care to die!
I should be glad to die: I am very tired.
Sir T. If failure rings the curtain down, perhaps
That way as well as any.
Lady S. Will you promise?
Sir T. No; I'll not promise! A thousand things may chance.
Lady S. A thousand things? Yes; should a foe of yours
Or Warwick's—Tristram, they may drown his wits
In all good fellowship! Then where are we?
Will you not go and guard him?
Sir T. Presently.
I have a thing to settle in my mind.
Lady S. May I go, Tristram?
Sir T. If you think it well.
Lady S. Oh, better than well, I think it. [*Knocking.* Not for me
I hope. [*Opens the door*] What? Who? The Bishop of St. James's!
Sir T. St. James's! Come—come in!

Enter GERVASE SACKVILLE, BISHOP OF ST. JAMES'S.

I thought the east
Had held you captive for another month.
St. J. I finished what I gave myself to do

In half the time I judged the work would take.
Lady S. Oh, welcome, Gervase! Like a single sorrow
You come to bless us: wonder at my words;
They have the sweetest meaning. Fortune comes
With Gervase, Tristram—how, I cannot tell:
Or short, or long, it comes: I feel it here;
But yet I go to guard the ark.
St. J. The ark?
Lady S. The theatre, the play, the purse—our lives!
[*Goes out.*
St. J. My cousin's moody, Tristram.
Sir T. I never thought
To need a friend for the last rite of friendship,
The revelation and unbosoming
Of weakness. Had you come a day, an hour,
Some heart-beats later, business, theatre, world,
With permanent eclipse of insight, soul,
Of something nameless yet, had spared you this
That I am going to tell you. Will you sit,
Or must you walk about?
St. J. The highest mood
Is stillest. [*They sit.*]
Sir T. Still as death! I loved my wife,
And she loved me: she loves me strangely yet
In some dispassionate absorbing way
That tortures her. I do not love her now;
And why I know: we have no children.
St. J. What!
Sir T. There must be fruit of love, if love's to last.
St. J. Now you perplex me, Tristram.
Sir T. There were children:
You christened four—and buried them. Ah, yes;

If they had lived!

St. J. If they had lived? What then?

Sir T. Profound affection for the hallowed womb
That gave my passion form and brought to light
Its ecstasy in boys and girls of mine:
Desire had changed to deep affection then;
But often now I loathe this childless woman,
And think with horror how she knows my heart,
My tendernesses, selfishnesses, thoughts
Inchoate, wanton follies, baby talk:
My wife became my mistress in the end.

St. J. Oh now I see into the depths of it!

Sir T. When our last child had died and she and I
Were raw with grief, unhinged by wild despair,
A fount and flame of lust arose in both,
As though we had eaten of some forbidden fruit,
Or swallowed magic earth, or been bewitched,
Or drenched with aphrodisiac. At the time
My fame was in the nadir, and our lives'
Duration insignificant to us:
So every night with poison in a vial
Beneath our pillow to end it when we chose,
A letch that never seemed to sate itself
Drained us of all humanity; but I,
Refined and tempered in the heat and cold,
Desire and languor, languor and desire,
The rhythm of this, by natural sorcery
Became at last an artist: think of it!
I found myself the master of the mood,
Enchanting folk and playing on their nerves
As though an audience were a zither; made
A name far-sounding; and, by your goodwill,

Am now—Heaven save the mark, the banal end!—
Am now, Sir Tristram Sumner, nominal,
As well as actual theatrocrat.

St. J. Do I speak now?

Sir T. Not yet. A jealousy
More sombre than my hate—a thing to note,
That love is never jealous of the past—
A sombre jealousy begot by hate
Began to whisper "Strike her; wound her; kill."

St. J. Your wife and I are cousins.

Sir T. Therefore I speak.
She has no kin but you to help her now.
Shall I go on?

St. J. Go on.

Sir T. My first of friends
Was Warwick Groom. Upon my marriage-morning
This letter came:—"Do you know that Warwick
"Groom and Martha Sackville were lovers? She
"visited him every night in his dressing-room at the
"Parthenon when he played Romeo; and the reason
"why he insisted on beginning the fourth act with
"the fifth scene of the third act was the reason you
"guess at once: it gave them time. But that was
"not the only place in the play where they performed
"their private intermede. How this was managed?
"Ask old Odham, Groom's dresser."

St. J. Malicious, were it not so impotent.

Sir T. Perhaps so; but I kept it.

St. J. So I see.
Whom have you shown it to?

Sir T. To none but you.

St. J. Burn it.

Sir T. [*Placing the letter in his pocket again*] I can't;
I feel it tells the truth.
St. J. Never believe it, Tristram! Martha Sackville,
Stately and unapproachable, and chaste
As fire and snow—whatever Martha Sumner
May be now.
Sir T. The wantonest women veil
Their lust with dignity; or knowing it not,
Feel it, and are constrained and awkward: broach
It once, then lechery rushes out unstopped
By——
St. J. Hush! Why have you told me this?
Sir T. Advice—
I want advice.
St. J. Tell me the rest.
Sir T. I thought
For half an hour when this came, reasoning thus:
"Martha is chaste: against my eyes and ears
"That I will die for"—I was deep in love.
"And if she dropped a stitch, what's that to me?
"Women are sensual, full of seed like men;
"But me she loves—a different fire from that
"Uneasy prurience wondering girls and boys
"Alike give facile way to, now and then.
"Have I no past? If she has hers, we both
"Begin the world anew." And best and worst
This Odham died upon my marriage-day.
St. J. What kind of man was he?
Sir T. A wastrel, prime
And perfect; a vocation—genius for it:
A parson's son, of course: acted himself
A while, then fell to dressing unperturbed.

He died of alcohol.—We played a week,—
He, Romeo, I, Mercutio; failed and lost
Three thousand pounds or so. But he and I
Were marked and sought for. Of the two I think
Groom was the abler actor, and certainly
Beyond comparison popular. Bidding high
After my marriage I declined to play
Except with mediocrities, having felt
Rather than recognised, how much depends
Upon the pathos of inequality,
The very essence of the theatre.
Groom was my rival in the public mind;
Therefore I made my book against him—he,
Against me, doubtless, burrowing underground.
Armed with advantage all unknown to him—
'Varsity, Policy, Church—I kept him out
Wherever I came in: not difficult
Without advantage even, he being then
As now, his own worst enemy, debauched
And drunken, with relapses of remorse.
In one relapse——

St. J. Relapse!

Sir T. ——he stormed the town;
Then failed and failed again; while I became
The representative actor of my time.
My fame is rooted in his infamy:
Especially in his; and in the fame
Eclipsed of every actor—which to me
Would be the blackest infamy.

St. J. So harsh!

Sir T. Truth, Gervase; it's the truth; no pleasure, power,

Glory, applause, but strikes its cancerous roots
Deep in the hearts of men; for what is fame
But envy by a virtuous title saved
From dying of chagrin, transmuted echo
Of curses and of sighs!

St. J. Come to the crux.

Sir T. I hate my wife. She forces Warwick on me
To play the part of Troilus. Suddenly
The nebulous past contracts to this: my wife
Was Warwick's mistress before she married me;
And I could kill them both. What must I do?

St. J. You must not kill them, and you must deny
That Martha was Warwick's mistress: deny it now.

Sir T. Deny the roundness of a woman's limbs,
Deny the sexes and that blood is red!
Well, I deny it, since I have no proof.
What next?

St. J. A simple thing. I long have thought
That marriages should end when love is dead—
On either side: the marriage vow should be
"Till love is dead," not "till death do us part";
And sacrament might end it solemnly,
As it began. The Church is backward there:
Its grip might fasten on the world again
If once divorce became a sacrament.

Sir T. Divorce?

St. J. Do you remember how I pled
Against your marriage?

Sir T. I remember.

St. J. Judged
My hidden purpose snobbish I suppose?

Sir T. I thought there underlay your argument

A dread of misalliance.

St. J. Wrong: my plea
Was candid. I maintained and still maintain
The artist should be celibate; a priest
Exempt from human ties.

Sir T. I think so too;
Though when I married Martha I desired
Experience of the noble cares of life,
As the true discipline and academe
Of art. How foolish! how insane! for art
Is like religion, only undefiled
In perfect freedom and abandonment.

St. J. You hang upon a verge of perilous truth:
Religion is the very art of art.
But that can wait: I have much to say on that.—
I hold it deadly sin, if anything
Is to be christened sin, for you and her
To live together longer, love being dead.
I counsel you to leave her; and I myself,
Who married you, will privately pronounce
A precept of divorce.

Sir T. But Martha's fate?

St. J. Her life will be most beautiful: refined
By love—by lust that purifies the soul
More certainly than any chastisement;
Disordered by the loss of all her children—
A doom that makes the deeds done in the flesh
Pernicious to the mind, to fancy noisome;
She shall become a perfect bride of Heaven—
Bride of the Universe.

Sir T. Gervase—how strange!
You counsel separation?

St. J. Before the law;
Before the Universe, divorce.
Sir T. Again,
The Universe!
St. J. News that can wait a while.
Sir T. And I should be the minister of art,
Unfettered by a single private tie,
A public votary. Yes; but how? the means?
Who will provide for Martha? And myself!
Who will provide for me? The day we part,
My creditors and hers—they ruin us.
St. J. And that is grave; yet may be overcome.
Sir T. But what a sordid hell we welter in!
Art is inhuman, Gervase.
St. J. Yes, all art,
And all religion and the life of man:
Inhuman, Tristram. Is it news to you?
Sir T. Then is there no humanity in men?
St. J. None, Tristram; none! Humanity! a dream
Phantasmal as divinity itself.
Sir T. Humanity, divinity—ideals?
Do you believe in nothing, Gervase?
St. J. No.
Belief——But that can wait.
Sir T. Wait! what can wait?
That is your cry to-day. What, and till when?
Is it a revelation?
St. J. Now you laugh;
And that is sane and good: the bitterest grin
Is hopeful. What I have to say can wait
Until—— Why do you reproduce to-night
This decadent, mordant, hateful travesty?

Sir T. "Troilus and Cressida"? It is my mood:
Man as he is—and woman. Oh, I stalk
A theory here! Heaven help us, and the cat!
I play Ulysses. [*The telephone rings.*

St. J. Shall I go?

Sir T. [*At the telephone*] No, Gervase!
What are you dubious of? (Yes. Martha! Well?
Groom? Drinking—drunk. How horrible? No. Yes.)
I'm ruined, Gervase! Martha saw and heard
Our fate to-night in that magnetic mood
She will solicit. (Yes. I come at once.)
We conquer if Warwick Groom plays Troilus;
If not our curtain's down, our lights are out,
My last part played.

[*Both have reached the door hurriedly and are about to go out.*

St. J. Not though your bitterest foe
Is satisfied to-night: for "fortune comes
"With me." So said your prophetess.

Sir. T. She did!
The day is young: the thing may be retrieved.
When shall I see you?

St. J. After the play.

Sir T. Till then?

St. J. I also have my art.

Sir T. You in your church,
I in my theatre.

St. J. One purpose serve?

ACT II

SCENE: *The stage of the Grosvenor Theatre, set for the first act of "Troilus and Cressida."* WARWICK GROOM *as Troilus and* SILAS ORCHARD *as Pandarus are seated in the entrance to Priam's castle. Each has a bottle of wine and a silver drinking-cup, and* GROOM *is turning over a book of the play.*

ABBOT, SALERNE, Actors *and* Scene-shifters, *at the back and in the wings.*

LADY SUMNER *passes at the back, wringing her hands.*

Groom. Pandar—Prince Pandarus of Troy!—why you,
You are the very spirit of the stage!
Orchard. You mean the part I play, not me myself.
Groom. What other meaning could I have? You *are*
The part you play, and nothing else besides.
Orchard. Now there you're wrong; I'm very much myself.
Groom. There's not a dozen actors in the town
Who can be anything but the part they play.
You are a glove, my prince, fit or misfit:
Suave to the fingers like a second skin;
Pushed on with wetted index, grunt, grimace;
Or like the gauntlet of a dwarf that splits
Upon a giant's thumb.
Orchard. And so are you!

Groom. So they would make me; but I'll be a hand—
As I have been. This play was made for me—
For Troilus; and I'll have the business changed,
Prince Pandarus of Troy. What kind of ape
Was he that played your Troilus? Heavens!—A glove
Would have rebelled. The whole rehearsed and drilled
For Cressida, Ulysses, Hector, Helen!
And Troilus—in the book at blood-heat—stuck
In the shade to freeze; cut, mangled, hanged, drawn, quartered!
I'll have my lines restored, my scenes rehearsed
According to their import. Pandar, room,
By your leave, for Troilus! Stand, Diomed!
Unmanned abortion, bowelless coward, stand!
Prince Pandarus of Troy, you are the stage,
The inner spirit and the outward man.
For what's the theatre but a splendid bawd—
A little passive recreation pitched
To span the abyss from dinner time till supper;
To season minds of maidens and of wives
With spice of marriage and adultery;
The shoeing-horn of whoredom and the nest
Of cuckolds. [ABBOT *comes down with* SALERNE *and several scene-shifters.*

Abbot. Now——

Groom. Avaunt, Sir Abbot! Fly!

Abbot. Sir Tristram may be any instant here.
Now, will you go, or must we help you?

Groom. Go?
Go where?

Abbot. To your dressing-room.

Groom. But I am dressed.

Abbot. The last time :—Will you go?

Groom. When I have played
My scene.

Abbot. Quick, men; away with him.

Groom. [*Beating them off with his sword*] Away
With *you.* D'ye take me for a property,
Thrice sodden shifters? Abbot—friar John,
Go, mop your tonsure. Skip about! Shift, shift,
Inevitable vermin of the stage!

Abbot. By God, sir, you'll remember this! You cur!

Groom. You'll not forget it either, business bug!
Your discounts, claims, commissions, premiums—ha!
My unjust steward, we must cork it in,
This honest indignation, righteous bile,
The rancour lacing all our thoughts, or else,
By rent and vent, the lining of our pokes,
Like treacherous entrails, Judas' viscera
To wit, may fundamentally escape,
And leave us poorer than we were before.
Go down—to the box-office!

Abbot. Thank the lord, Sir Tristram!

Enter SIR TRISTRAM SUMNER.

'Twas not my fault, at all; I did my best.
They treated him; he treated them: the wine's
Above the tide-mark, and the fat in the fire.

Sir T. Orchard?

Orchard. Oh, very well, Sir Tristram! Off
I go. Send for me if you want me: none
Shall say that Silas Orchard overstayed
His welcome. [*Goes out.*

Sir T. Send a line to Orchard's rooms:
See that the messenger is there before him:
No man in England can play the part like him.
[ABBOT *and* SALERNE, etc., *go out.*
Now what's the matter, Warwick?
Groom. This gutted play!
You've cut the very things I want to say.
Here in my first scene comes your pruning-hook,
Your harvester, and shears my poppied patch:—
"Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl":—
Why man, it's poetry: I want to say it.
Then here——
Sir T. Yes, yes; but this? Why this? You make
My theatre a pothouse.
Groom. Pothouse? [*Drinks*] Why,
Your theatre's well enough to drink in, Knight.
Knight? Vain, deluded, damned theatrocrat!
Sir T. What, Warwick! What!
Groom. An actor knighted! Once
The actor was an artist here in England.
When England in Queen Bess's time became
A world above the world, and felt itself
Adult and masculine, then lightly came
The actor and the act, outside the state,
Authentic and alone.
Sir T. Enough of that!
We know your fantasies. Will you attempt
The part; or are you spoiled for this time, Warwick?
Groom. I'll speak this matter out. When plays were damned
By churchmen, and the player a citizen
Of rascaldom on sufferance living only,

Great was the stage, a lover of all life,
The friend of sinners and the home of sin,
A city of refuge for humanity
Escaping from religion and the curses
Of the law; for church and stage are deadly foes;
They can be strong only in enmity;
And both were shrines of art when either shunned
The other, or met in battle: now that they mix,
Illicit lovers and against the lust
Of nature, sterile hybrids mock their couch;
And soon the lofty strain of either ends
In mere abortion. When the monarch set
The lethal signet on the theatre
Of gross respectability, knighting you,
Sir Tristram, and other players unfortunate,
Ranking you in the state with grocers, brewers,
Distillers, lawyers, painters, aldermen,
He dealt a double blow at church and stage
And both are bleeding from the wound.

Sir T. Why this
To me—me specially?

Groom. Because you haunt
The clergy, and the clergy fawn on you,
Singling you out: the Bishop of St. James's
Is fast your friend: and nonconformists—Hell!
Have sung your praise in public. I maintain
The stage must stand alone like all things great,
Unspotted of the church, the state, the world.

Sir T. You try my patience. This is so—all this,
And endless matter to a like intent.

Groom. But who has grasped the meaning? who perceives

That these luxurious theatres of ours
Are only living graves—the ornate tomb
Of drama?

Sir T. I perceive it. Hopeful men
Are always digging graves unwittingly;
Cathedrals—noble cenotaphs of faith
Long dead: academies—of plastic art
The tomb; our ancient universities—
The mausoleum and the monument
Of learning; justice in the law-courts buried
Lies most worshipfully; soon our sculptured banks—
To make an end—will be the sepulchre
Of all finance: is not the whole world bankrupt?

Groom. Turn it to ribaldry! I love the stage,
And hate to see it made the prostitute
Of crafty godliness that's mainly this—
The rancid odour of a worn-out sex.
To see the stage that should be sweet, humane,
More tolerant than art, freer than sin—
Let me say sin to mean all human scope,
The utmost license of unbridled mirth,
The noble freedom of the tragic mood,
A perfect liberty of drift and range,
The universal mind and deed of man:
To see the stage corrupted by the church,
Debauched by bland religion, venomous
Betrayer of the spirit; and foul with creed,
The helpless necessary excrement
Wherewith religion sullies everything:
To see this loathsome doom of what I love
Is deadlier to me than blank despair,
Than death and everlasting obloquy.

Sir T. To me it means the element I use,
For church and stage are dramaturgy both:
The one inspires a happy will to death;
The other floods the soul of man with life.
If you must carp against the stage, attack
The usury that leads it on a chain,
Exploiting all that's base: there's loads of gold
In flattered meannesses; the public pays
To be degraded: easiest escape
Is downward to the abyss; the greasy plank
Requires no effort.

Groom. Tristram of the times,
The creature of infectious decadence
That triumphs everywhere: a harvest home
Of mellow, putrid autumns; afternoon
And twilight of the state, the church, the stage.
By heaven and earth, the syndicated shows
That pay the big percentages are sweet
Beside a gelded Shakespeare, and the priest
Pronouncing benediction from the stalls!

Sir T. The decadence is everywhere?—perhaps;
But how should that concern the decadents?
Their function is to hasten the decay.
It has been held, it has been proved that life
Is but the decadence of matter, soul
The decadence of life; now, soul itself,
The parasite that drains the sap of life,
Begins *its* decadence. But what of that?
We must go through with it.—Come, will you play
Prince Troilus, boy; or, flatly, are you drunk?

Groom. [*Drinks*] I cannot tell; perhaps: I love to drink:

The dingy world becomes a crystal orb
Revealing truth when wine enlightens me—
Truth like a sumptuous vision in a bell
Of dew, a magic bubble blown to film
That melts and bursts, a passion of delight,
A shimmering womb of diverse stains and deep.
By Bacchus and his panthers, I believe
A great career of drunkenness were worth
A man's ambition! Alcohol's as good
As law, the church, the army, or the stage!
Henceforth my business and my art will be
To drink and to be drunken. [*Drinks*] Odours faint
Of pallid wayside roses, heavier scents
Of roses of the garden, deeper snares
Of bowls of roses ripe and faded, bowls
Of leaves of roses, faded, dark and sweet,
The last aroma! Clusters of the vine,
Mature, deep-bosomed, umbered with the sun;
Old dregs and essences of happiness,
Of women's pulses wound like springs of steel,
Of sanguine wars, of sinews, swords, of hearts
As hard as nether millstones, burning love
Like molten adamant! Oh, heaven and hell
Are wed and wanton in a cup of wine,
Bouquet and ichor of eternity!
I shall go out and cry it in the streets.

Sir T. [*To the* Actors *in the wings*] Go with him to his room. Let him drink on
Until he sleeps. That is the end of this.

[GROOM *goes out, accompanied by the* Actors.

Lady S. [*Coming down quickly*] And this the end for us, Sir Tristram. Drink.

Sir T. [*Taking the vial which* LADY SUMNER *offers*]
Are you insane? You have not drunk?
Lady S. Not yet.
Here on your stage we two must die together—
An ever famous tragedy of art
In this uncouth commercial age of ours.
I hear it still: "If Warwick Groom plays Troilus."
He cannot play it now—poor Warwick Groom!
Ambiguous poison in that "if"; but death
Will end all ambiguity. Tristram, drink.
Sir T. Your eyes are wandering, pale and beggarly;
Your voice is phantom-like, far off and chill:
Martha, you have gone mad.
Lady S. We both were mad;
But I am sane at last: I cannot live.
Be sane, and drink.
Sir T. Not here, not now, not ever.
Lady S. Not? But defeat is here, is everywhere;
Behind the scenes, in front, and in our hearts.
You promised me a hundred thousand times
You never would survive defeat.
Sir T. We loved
Each other then; and were you now to say,
"If failure rings the curtain down to-night,
"Let us two, having loved each other well,
"Having discharged ourselves of all our love,
"Die in each other's arms", I should assent;
Forget these years of dull estrangement; snatch
You off to Venice or Palermo; end
Defeat and triumph, and the world and time
In one superb and golden aftermath,
A full-eared harvest-moon of winnowed love.

Lady S. Your words are like a smoky gust of heat
Across a wilderness of snow! Shame! shame!
Sir T. I cannot love where I am not beloved,
And will not die to please an unloved wife.
Lady S. But I do love you, Tristram! Love you? Oh,
Did I not give you all the love I had?
I love you now with something more than love;
And never shall I rest until my dust,
Cold, senseless, passionless, inanimate,
Divinely rotted into virgin mould,
Is mixed with yours to all eternity.
Sir T. A deadly love—that has the ring of hate!
Lady S. It is a kind of hate. I cannot live!
I cannot live! I cannot let you live!
Remember, Tristram, how like frantic beasts
We toiled at love. Oh! . . . Oh! . . . How long I fought
This grinding passion of remorse, how strove
To deem the noxious beautiful! A fan
Against a storm! The wind is up; my boat
Beats on the breakers; all is swamped and lost.
Sir T. But beauty sanctioned all our frantic love.
Sometimes a moment's nausea—yes, sometimes
I shudder when I think; but hurl it off
Because I know the meaning: I am tired,
Depressed, too solitary; or forget
To eat, absorbed in study: food and wine
Replenish all my powers, and straightway sex
Becomes the purest wonder in the world.
Lady S. My sex is dead: it dies in women, sex.
I sinned; my life was sin; and since the power
To sin is dead, the sinner must die too.

Sir T. But I have still the power, the will to sin.
Lady S. How hateful! Oh, how hateful! Tristram, think!
Failure, defeat, disgrace—certain, to-night:
I see it, feel it, know it; and never yet
Has my delivered mood brought back to me
A lying message. Better instant death!
Sir T. But fortune came with Gervase—so you said.
Lady S. I felt a sudden lifting of despair
When Gervase came; but that was death: he brought
Religion, resignation, denial, death.
Oh, we must die! Conceive what failure means!
Eyes of commiseration, scornful lips,
Emphatic pressure of a pitying hand,
Thrice gracious bows, and triple-hatted shrugs,
Sugared contempt, and rancour heavy-spiced
Must never greet us, Tristram: we must die.
You would not have our special enemy,
The whipper-in of anti-Sumnerites,
In print and prattle triumph nauseously?
Sir T. A change, by heaven! Are you not she who held
No jargon ever writ or babbled hurt
An artist or an artist's wife?
Lady S. I did,
Being sick and sore and wounded to the quick:
Who talks of jargon says "my soul is stung".
The mask is off, Sir Tristram. I'm going to die;
And mean to tell the truth right on from now
Until we drink that draught together. Choose:
A flood of truth about the world and us,
Or death immediately. Let it be death.

The pain it is to me to live! Oh, Tristram!

Sir T. I mean to live; and so do you. Defeat
Is not so sure: at least, my own success
Is certain always, though the play may fail—
As plays have failed before and will again.

Lady S. Not this time: *you* will fail: you will be hissed!

Sir T. Martha!

Lady S. I saw and heard: I hear it now.
The long hiss from the gallery like a scourge,
A skilful hiss that flicks the proper sore:
You only, not the play. Your race is run;
Come, be a man and die. After to-night
What life is ours? First, bankruptcy: the court,
Exposure of our choice extravagance,
That seemed so needful to our finer souls;
The sale of our belongings next, friends, foes
Bidding for things that are a part of us:
Oh, I would just as soon walk naked down
The Strand, as have my skirts and linen tossed
And fingered by the women-folk I know!
Give me the poison if you will not drink;
I'll die alone. Give it me, when I ask!
Will you not give it me? And afterwards—
Oh afterwards! The provinces! What said
Poor Warwick? I remember: "Stations, inns
"Provincial companies and theatres,
"The dismallest labyrinth where every step
"Stumbles at skeletons of dead ambitions!"
Give me my vial, Tristram; give it me.

Sir T. You know the play will fail! you hear that hiss?

Lady S. Nothing is surer.

Sir T. Then we must not die,
For should we die we make your vision vain.
Lady S. How can you jest! Oh, hateful! Oh, unkind!
Sir T. Not so: I say your augury mistakes;
I challenge you to live and find it false.
Lady S. You know it is not false. I speak the truth,
Nothing but truth!
Sir T. Why, then, an intermede!
Had I your maidenhead?
Lady S. Ah—h—h!
Sir T. Tell the truth.
Lady S. Unholy beast! give me the poison, quick!
I want to die; I want to die alone!
Sir T. That might be well; but not just now, nor here.
Lady S. I wonder . . . Could I drown myself? Alone?
Sir T. Salerne! Salerne! [*Goes out.*

Re-enter SALERNE.

The understudy's dressed?
Salerne. He is.
Sir T. And Groom? Asleep?
Salerne. As sound as Noah.
Sir T. Have him sent home.
Salerne. The other principals?
Sir T. Detain them still. I must rehearse the play.

ACT III

SCENE: *Sir Tristram Sumner's Reception-room in the Grosvenor Theatre. At the back a door opens into a business-room. On the left is the Dressing-room. The entrance to the Reception-room is on the right.* HILDRETH *is writing at a table when the act begins.*

Enter ABBOT.

Hildreth. What? Is the curtain down?
Abbot. Not yet.
Hildreth. The play?
Abbot. Still-born: so dead a house I never saw.
To-day's rehearsal sealed our doom. I pled—
I prayed him on my knees to touch no tone,
No movement, entrance, exit, gesture, pause,
Procession, picture, colour, light or shade;
But that she-devil and walking-ghost, his wife,
Had roused a deadlier devil in him: our chief
Undoes a month's fine artistry in three
Sick hours of mischief.
Hildreth. I've seen the thing before:
Rehearsal is the purgatory of plays;
It fits them for beatitude; but turn
Rehearsal into hell, then farewell heaven.
Abbot. A pin-prick does it.

Enter SALERNE.

Well, Salerne—Heaven, hell,
And purgatory, what's the matter, man?
Why, you're as grey as putty!

Salerne. Where were you?

Abbot. When?

Salerne. When the curtain fell.

Abbot. I sheltered here.
I'm barometric: I predicted frost,
And feared I might catch cold.

Salerne. Your death of cold.
The chief was hissed.

Abbot. Sir Tristram Sumner hissed?
Impossible!

Hildreth. He was not hissed!

Salerne. He was.
A solitary hiss at first; and then
The gallery caught it up and let it loose,
Like gas escaping from an old-time batten.

Abbot. But was it meant for him?

Salerne. Straight at his head
And not a hand to drown it.

Hildreth. No applause?

Salerne. Before the hiss a little civil noise,
But not a cry, no cheer, no name, no call.

Hildreth. Why did he come before the curtain then

Salerne. Fatuitous: his instinct failed him quite.

Abbot. He thought his personality might win
A vote of confidence against the play.

Salerne. That was his hope, no doubt. Ah, here he comes!

Enter SIR TRISTRAM SUMNER *as Ulysses. His dresser,* TEMPLE, *follows him, carrying a portmanteau, which he sets on a chair. While* SIR TRISTRAM *is changing he sometimes stands in the doorway of his dressing-room and sometimes speaks from within.* TEMPLE *takes from the portmanteau* SIR TRISTRAM'S *evening dress and goes into the dressing-room.*

Sir T. Who had the gallery to-night?
Abbot. A man
Appointed yesterday.
Sir T. A novice?
Abbot. No,
Sir Tristram; from the Parthenon.
Sir T. A soldier?—
The tables and the wine? Is all prepared?
Salerne. Yes; everything.
Sir T. See that they set it out
Courageously.— [SALERNE *goes out.*
A soldier, did you say?
Abbot. In Egypt and the Transvaal.
Sir T. Intelligent?
Abbot. I think he is.
Sir T. Send for him. [ABBOT *goes out.*
Letters, Hildreth?
Ah, what are these? The bank, the law. No stamp;
Not posted; sent by hand.
Hildreth. An hour ago.
Sir T. Well, we have scorned such documents before.
Set them aside unopened.—Did you hear?
Hildreth. Hear? No.
Sir T. They hissed me, Hildreth.

Hildreth. Glad I am
I did not hear.

Sir T. The foulest, meanest sound,
The hatefullest! How nauseous men can be!
I think I sooner would be hissed than hiss.
The paltriness, the impotence of one
Who hisses! It hurts; it kills: a hiss can kill:
I think a hiss could kill. A curious thing,
That impotence should have the power to kill!
A strange beast, man! [*The telephone rings.*

Hildreth. [*At the telephone*] Mark Belfry wants to see you.

Sir T. Oh! . . . Let him come.

Hildreth. [*At the telephone*] (Yes. Now.)

Sir T. I needed this—
To be well hissed: a shower-bath for the soul:
It strengthens me. An actor can't be great?
I think he can.

Enter MARK BELFRY.

Well Belfry, how are you?

Belfry. In health, Sir Tristram.

Sir T. Have you come to buy
The theatre?

Belfry. I have.

Sir T. It's not for sale.

Belfry. It will be soon.

Sir T. As soon as I am dead.

Belfry. What are you going to do?

Sir T. This lasts a week.
To-morrow I rehearse an old success.

Belfry. And after that?

Sir T. I cannot tell.
Belfry. I can.
Sir T. Predict.
Belfry. I shall provide you with a play.
Sir T. Never!
Belfry. I take the risk.
Sir T. No name but mine
Shall flourish on my bills whilst I am here.
I hate your Yankee style, your affectation:
"Presents Sir Tristram Sumner!" No, Mark Belfry!
Belfry. That I forego. I want your theatre. Yes;
I mean to have it. Any kind of hold
To start with! Oh, I'll own the Grosvenor yet!
I fight in the open. I'll finance you; flood
Your desert, for I guess your Nile's dried up;
I'll gild the wolf's clean teeth, and flesh them too,
With prime American dentistry. No name
But yours; and no condition but my play.
It gallops hard at home; there's money in it;
A part to fit you; colours, crowds and kings.
It's curious how it came to be, this play.
One of your poets wrote upon commission——
Sir T. For you?
Belfry. For me.
Sir T. A poet, Belfry!
Belfry. Well,
The sketch was good; I liked it and the man.
The play was good, too—better than the stuff
We're acting; but I saw how out of it,
Instead of something that would crown his fame——
Sir T. The poet's?
Belfry. Yes, the poet's! Out of his play,

That might have been a stage-mark for a brace
Of centuries or so, I saw there could be shaped
A popular success to overrun
The English-speaking world for just two years,
Extract a ton of money, and be forgotten
For ever after: which is what we want.

Sir T. Indubitably.

Belfry. A commodious hack
I keep, transferred the scene, the folk, to Spain
From England, changed the age, and vulgarized
The whole. The trick was done; the money flows.

Sir T. And what about the poet?

Belfry. He trusted me;
He has no claim.

Sir T. I think the law——

Belfry. We all
Risk that.

Sir T. You shameful Yankee salesman! Play
Your tricks elsewhere.

Belfry. Don't hear you; business first.

Sir T. I've some here to attend to. Will you join
The others on the stage? No? Well; good night.

Belfry. I'll have your theatre yet! [*Goes out.*

Sir T. Never. Good night.

Re-enter ABBOT *with* BOULDER.

Are you the gallery?

Boulder. I am, Sir Tristram.

Sir T. What did it? Is there anything to tell?

Boulder. There is, Sir Tristram.

Sir T. Tell it, please.

Boulder. Before

The curtain fell I saw a woman's head,
A lady's, on the stair.
Sir T. What do you mean?
Boulder. It seemed to rest upon the topmost step
From where I stood and watched.
Abbot. The lady climbed
No further than the middle of the stair—
That's what he means, I think. Her head
Appeared just in the entrance.
Boulder. My meaning, sir.
The palest face I ever saw: her eyeballs
Turned about and showed the whites; she gasped
For breath and drew a deep one. While I watched,
Wondering what might be right, her eyes came down,
Dull, dead, and horrible, and she hissed like hell.
Then everybody hissed. I hissed myself.
I beg your pardon: I could no more keep
From hissing than I could from crying out
When once a dervish stabbed me at Khartoum.
The gallery felt the same; I asked those near
What set them on it, and they said they heard
A hideous hiss that made them hiss like hell.
Sir T. So. And the lady?
Boulder. Vanished into space.
Sir T. Or down the stair. You knew her?
Boulder. No, Sir Tristram.
Sir T. Of course; your first night here.
Boulder. I couldn't help
The hissing. Like something in a battle, hiss
It went and everybody hissed.
Sir T. No need
To trouble; I conceive the thing.

Boulder. We hissed
Because we couldn't help it.
Sir T. Say the word
Again, and I'll hiss too! Good night, my man.
Boulder. Good night, Sir Tristram. [*Goes out.*
Sir T. Hildreth, Abbot; come.—
About this lady not a word remember.—
I'll ask you something; did you ever see
A woman's soul?
Hildreth. I never did, Sir Tristram.
Sir T. Abbot?
Salerne. Nor I.
Sir T. And never may you need to!
Once on a time I saw a woman's soul.
I looked and looked, expecting colours, flowers,
A perfume and an opal. I found instead
A sooty cobweb diapered with limbs
And empty hulls of captives long undone.
I shook it, but the spider made no sign:
It, too, was dead. I brushed the film away,
And where it hung a mortal crevice yawned,
Obscene and dark and barren as the grave.—
How late it is! My guests will all be gone.
Come, quickly.—Prophecies fulfil themselves.
[*The three go out.*

TEMPLE *re-enters from the Dressing-room, packs the clothes* SIR TRISTRAM *had been wearing during the day, closes the portmanteau and goes out.*

Enter BLYTH, *carrying a lady's hat and clothes. He looks about, and then beckons at the door of the Reception-room.*

Enter EUROPA TROOP, *as Cressida.*

Blyth. [*Pointing to the Business-room*] In there.

Europa. Turn up the light.

[BLYTH *lights up the Business-room.*

A smell of leather;
Ledgers; business-smell; red ink and copying-ink—
The faintest spice: I feel them in the air.
Turn out the light.

[BLYTH *extinguishes the light in the Business-room.*

The smells are out as well.
I saw the books, the pots. Turn up the light.

[BLYTH *lights up the Business-room.*

The smells again. The senses, Blyth, are glued
Together. Did you ever see a smell?

Blyth. Fumes?

Europa. Oh, yes!—fumes. Now Blyth, is this correct?
Won't Abbot and his clerks be here again?

Blyth. That's not the counting-house. Sir Tristram's own.

Europa. Sir Tristram's own?

Blyth. His private business-room.

Europa. This is the most palatial theatre!
Dispose my things—there, on the roll-top desk.

[BLYTH *does so.*

I'll risk it, Blyth. [*Gives* BLYTH *money.*

Blyth. [*Counting the money*] One short. You promised five.

Europa. [*Gives a fifth sovereign*] I know I did. I thought you'd let me off.

Blyth. You'll know me better next time.

Europa. That's the style!

We can collaborate.

Blyth. What are you getting at?
What do you want to know?

Europa. I'll tell you, Blyth.
I want to know what makes this theatre feel
Uncanny. All the time I'm like a ghost
Astray in some mirage.

Blyth. A plump one, lady;
A very handsome one.

Europa. Thanks, Blyth; I'm fit.
I'll tell you something else, because I like you:
I want to take possession of Sir Tristram;
I have it in me, Blyth. What do you think?

Blyth. Sir Tristram's married and a gentleman.

Europa. And I'm an actress: an actress, do you see?
And furthermore, and most, there's not a crowd
Of actresses in London, or in the world.

Blyth. A many actresses have tried it on.

Europa. And all have failed, and all were bound to fail;
But every one prepared Europa's path.

Blyth. Sir Tristram's reputation's not that kind.
He's most respectable in every way:
The clergy patronize him.

Europa. I know all that.—
Well, kiss me, Blyth; my cheek. You're handsomer
Than Tristram. What! Are *you* respectable?

Blyth. No; but the money. I stick to that, you know.

Europa. Oha! Ohe! Why, there's another lot;
[*Gives him money and kisses him.*
And this for being so smart a simpleton.
You're mine, remember; body and soul, you're mine.

Blyth. I'm yours.

Europa. Now hurry, Blyth, or you'll be missed.
[BLYTH *goes out.*
And I'll be mistress here, or know who is.
Blyth, Blyth! Come back!

Re-enter BLYTH.

Blyth. For God's sake, not so loud!
Europa. Some day, I'll shout.—What do they think of me?
You heard them pass remarks.
Blyth. I heard them say
Europa's just the best thing in the show.
Europa. That's what I like to hear! Dear Blyth! Be off!
[BLYTH *goes out.*
The best thing in the show—Europa just,
Who caught and held Sir Tristram's eyes to-day
Until he fathomed hers. I think we said,
If looks can speak, "I'm ready when you like."
A footstep and a skirt. Sir Tristram's wife?
[*Closes the door, leaving it ajar. Turns out the light in the Business-room.*

Enter LADY SUMNER. *Opening the portmanteau she searches her husband's pockets.*

Lady S. Is this the place? No; better in the house;
Best in his bed; the moment he comes home!
Oh, beautifully done to drink it there
And then! And with my dying breath to curse
My husband for a coward that killed my soul,
And feared himself to die. I'm not afraid.
After I'm dead I'll come to life again,
And tell him what he asked; and when I'm dead

Indeed, my wraith will haunt him, whispering still
The thing he asked : who had my earliest kiss
Of love ; who woke my heart and strung my soul
To ecstasy *he* withered with his lust.
I'll hiss it nightly in his waking ear ;
Torture him too with dreams. Not every night ;
But now and then to wear him out with doubt :
I'll madden him and kill him patiently.
[*She finds the letter as well as the vial.*
What faded letter's this? [*Reads*] "Do you know
"that Warwick Groom and Martha Sackville were
"lovers? She visited him every night in his dressing-
"room at the Parthenon when he played Romeo ; and
"the reason why he insisted on beginning the fourth
"act with the fifth scene of the third act was the reason
"you guess at once : it gave them time. But that
"was not the only place in the play where they
"performed their private intermede. How this was
"managed? Ask old Odham, Groom's dresser."
He must have known
The day he married me ! My head will burst !
"She visited him every night in his dressing-room."
He knew this and he married me ! My soul
It is that struggles in my wasted womb,
And cannot be brought forth but by my death,
A still-born soul and posthumous, since God
Is not ! I have been nothing—worse than nothing :
A bed-mate, a convenience ! Hell, hell, hell ! [*Goes out.*
Europa [*At the door of the Business-room*] If I could
act like that ! But good, my luck !
Sweet luck and succulent ! Dear luck of mine !
Plumb in the prime-joint of their mystery sticks

My fork! The venison's hung and high! I'll cut
And come again! Soul? Talk of soul! Give me
My will, my body and my clean-run brains,
Me and my purposes!

Sir T. [*Without*] I'll not go home
To-night.

Europa. Sir Tristram's voice!

[*Closes the door and turns out the light.*

St. J. [*Without*] What will you do?

Enter SIR TRISTRAM *and* ST. JAMES'S.

Sir T. Sleep at the club. Sit down awhile and talk.

[SIR TRISTRAM *takes from a cabinet a spirit-frame, a syphon, and a box of cigars, and helps* ST. JAMES'S *and himself.* SIR TRISTRAM *reclines on a couch.* ST. JAMES'S *remains on his feet throughout the scene, sometimes pacing, sometimes standing still.*

St. J. But should your wife be left alone?

Sir T. For her,
The safest way: she's bent upon my death,
And while I keep alive she lives, I think.
Best, too, for me.

St. J. How is it best for you?

Sir T. Because it's touch and go to live or die.
My life's no prize to me—worth this cigar
Perhaps; and when her stealthy whine assails
Me, begging death, I'm tempted to the point.
A little tenderness in her, a look
Of womanhood, or honey in her voice,
And there might then have been no play to-night,

But love and endless sleep. That exit's closed:
I could not die consorted with my wife,
My resolute enemy.

St. J. This sudden crash—
It jarred to-day already—is strange in you,
As my remembrance notes you.

Sir T. There can be
No reconcilement now. She prophesied
To-night's disaster, and to make all sure
Began the hissing on the gallery stairs.

St. J. She didn't!

Sir T. But she did: none other, she.

St. J. How horrible!

Sir T. Oh, worse than horrible!
The woman whom I chose has now become
A scaly leprosy about my life.

St. J. That's damnable! No more of that! Your wife
Is deeply in the right: your corpses only
Could fill the breach that opens up between you:
It is the grave that gapes. If you're to live
It must be by divorce. Do you consent?

Sir T. That also means the grave; for if we break
Our home up, bankruptcy and ruin come:
Indeed they're here already. Look at these.

[*Hands* ST. JAMES'S *the two letters.*

St. J. [*Having read one of the letters*] That's nothing
but a seeming urgent threat,
And very vilely-civilly worded too:
Lawyer and gentleman are synonyms,
But the law's not a gentleman.

[*Having opened the second letter.*
What's this?

Your bankers?—Ah!—"and if"—

Sir T. Don't read it out.

St. J. [*Having read the second letter*] If this is met you have a breathing-space?

Sir T. I can go on again.

St. J. Then this I'll meet.

Sir T. Oh, Gervase!

St. J. Not disinterested alone:
Infinite things to talk of! First of all,
Why do you set so small a price on life?
You once were proud of your vocation, knew
The meaning of the theatre, felt its wide
Domain.

Sir T. Yes, but I know it now too well,
Even as I know my wife and Warwick Groom.
Let me not know you well, Gervase, not well:
Show me the best in minims and in grams,
But hide the bulk and flood in clouds of dawn,
In silvery mists, the nimbus and the shrine
Of air and sky: the soul should not be seen,
Though mine be naked now.

St. J. You suffer, Tristram.
Naked your soul is, wounded——

Sir T. Flayed alive!
Oh, Gervase, what a spirit of delight,
Of fragrant hope, of fervent faith in men,
I brought incarnate to the theatre!

St. J. Full of vocation, I remember you:
Chiefly in Wytham Wood one afternoon——

Sir T. Ah, how we beat our academic wings
In woods, on hilltops, longing for the world
And to take up our destiny! It took

Me up, and laid me down, and racked and flayed
With unremitting care.
St. J. You held the stage
To be the true adventure of the times.
The earth was known, you said : if magic isles,
Orchards of Hesperus ; or queens asleep
For centuries ; or that supreme emprise,
The middle passage of the maze of streams,
Acheron, Phlegethon, Cocytus, Styx,
And the return alive from Dis's hall
Through groves of poplar, whispered madnesses,
Obsequious willows, cries, the wild lament
Of old companions, and the doleful shriek
Of her, the best-belov'd, to utter woe
Abandoned : had such high renown been still
Achievable, then had you hoisted sail
And led the way ; but since the whole sad world
Was now become mere shop and market-place,
The stage remained the one way of escape,
The one adventure for the adventurous.
Sir T. I thought so ; I believed so. But I found
The most ignoble strife ; a jug of asps,
Where envy, vanity, avarice, wanton spite
Torment and are tormented ; with such a gloss
Of tolerance and of fellowship—humour, tears,
That soothe the grit of misery into pearl !
St. J. Men cross to fortune on the stepping-stones
Of ruined rivals ; matter exploits us so ;
But which is better off, who triumphs most,
The ruined or the ruiner ? That's reserved.
Sir T. I know, I know ! And then the modern play !
St. J. Let us not think it !

Sir T. Only once it seems
A people has a theatre. Drama leaps
To instant being, power, supremacy:
From "Gorboduc" to "The Tempest" fifty years;
And nothing since. Nor can it come again,
Imagination being an outcast now,
Unsceptred, unrefreshed, unclad, unknown
In palace, hut, or hermitage: no home;
A wandering bedlam. When the world believed
In miracles of sorcery, potent drugs
Alchemical, and constellated fate
In heaven hung, then fancy had a lodge——
St. J. All this is so——
Sir T. Be patient! Here I snatch
A moment's ease, as in an interval
Of torture. While the worn-out squaws repose,
(Harpies or fiends: the laugh twists on my mouth!)
Devising keener pangs, I hear again
The fabulous music of the crystalline
Accordant spheres; so let this perfume fade,
Wind-wafted fragrance of a love-lorn scarf
Bidding farewell for ever and a day.
When elves and fairies haunted brakes and bowers,
And gods and goddesses were visitors
Hesternal at the latest; when Heaven and Hell
Was as a casket closed about the earth,
The universal jewel; and man himself
The awful judge of angels and the mate
Of God, worthy divine redemption, then
There broke a drama great and beautiful
Fresh from the dulcet brains and pregnant heart
Of England. Soul was clad; the mind, informed;

Imagination, armed, anointed, crowned;
But now all naked, empty, abject, stripped
And flayed! You understand?
St. J. I understand.
Men know there is no God, no Heaven and Hell:
They welcomed that in secret—all who thought.
But, God away, the Universe becomes
A vacuum, and the welcome turns to cursing.
They thought, "We need no God; we have our art,
"Our poetry: God is gone." But all else went
When God went: 'twas the breath of God that filled
The pipe of Pan, the bosom and the sigh
Of Aphrodite; goblins, loreleis,
Enchantments, witchcraft, ghosts, transcendent deeds,
Amazement, terror, beauty, rapture, tears,
Intolerable passions, agonies
Were of the warp and woof of God: God summed
Imagination.
Sir T. And there's no such God!
St. J. No God to speak of: the idea of God—
That's for the schoolmen: for the fatherless,
The girls that drown their bastards, broken hearts,
Incapables, incurables, castaways,
Endurers, heroes, poets, artists, kings,
Classes or masses, all who love their lives—
It helps them much to tell them of a God
Evolving slowly in the mind of man!
Sir T. But Christ, the man of sorrows?
St. J. I never preach
The man of sorrows now. . . . I grasp my theme:
Give me your eye and ear, your heart and brain.
Jesus of Nazareth—no, the Son of Man;

Because this Jesus is a sloppy word,
Mainly a sponge to wipe the tiresome tears
Of foolish people. He, then, the Son of Man——
Sir T. But this you never preached in Westminster?
St. J. Never directly; nor shall I preach it there.
Not of the pulpit; of the stage, this theme
Demands a crowded theatre and the mood
Expectant, tyrannous of the gallery, not
The mood submissive of the worshipper.
Sir T. My nerves begin to tingle, telepaths
Of coming wonder. Till I hear it all
You shall not leave the theatre.
[*At the telephone*] (Blyth, I stay
Awhile. What do you say? What lady? Oh!—
My wife went home! Yes, you may go. My key?
I have it. True. Good night.) Now, Gervase, speak
As if it were the judgment-day!
St. J. It is—
It always is; and could we hear it peal,
Each moment, heavy with eternal doom,
Thunders in every heart.
Sir T. Then speak to me
As one about to die.
St. J. I speak as one
About to live!
Sir T. To one about to live!
St. J. This question like an automatic rack
Seized me and stretched me: "Will you teach a lie?"
"Behold," I cried; "I have a tender heart—
"Soft-hearted am I; let a harder man
"Confront this problem, lead the great revolt.
"Though this of God and Sin and Heaven and Hell

"Be now worn out, yet have I nothing new
"To traffic for it: let a stronger man
"Become protagonist and martyr; I
"Already faint: let this cup pass from me."
Oh it was good to say to broken hearts—
The faded women and the old worn men—
"Come unto me and I will give you rest."
St T. 'Tis easy comforting the poor with heaven.
And those that never tasted delicate meats,
Soft music, murmurs, vintages mature,
And savoury ecstasy of man and woman.
St J. Kings, conquerors, artists, poets, power and wealth
Demand a concrete heaven, just like the poor.—
Still the rack wrenched me, "Will you teach a lie?"
So tortured, I betook me to the east,
The womb and cradle, nurse and school of thought,
Of knowledge, poetry, religion, art.
There in the desert, insufferable beams
Their daily meaning smote through every sense;
By night the deep immensity of heaven
Revealed its wonder: all the centuries.
The tattered stoles and finery of Time.
Departed from me, and I knew myself
Material in a Universe of pure
Material substance, conscious mystery throned
On the eternal moment that becomes
For ever new. "This is for me," I thought:
"Enough that one man once should so transcend:
"Let the world now decay." But the last pangs
Of Hell laid instant hold on me and put
Me to the question: "Will you teach a lie?"

"What must I teach?" I cried. "Teach thou the truth,"
The answer came, "the pure, material truth;
"But firstly *know* the truth about the lie."
Sir T. What is the truth about it, Gervase?
St. J. This:—
That Christianity is the foe of life,
Of health, of wealth, of intellect and strength;
The friend of all the feeble, the diseased,
The low, the loathsome, the depraved, the dirt,
The offal of mankind. Instinctively the strong
Laid hands upon it and wove imperial power
Out of its filthy rags: a purple star
Of high unchristian sovereignty in Rome;
In England here an aristocracy
Of brains and culture. Long they kept in check,
The churchdoms did, with Hell and Heaven for sword
And buckler, and a sense of sin to salt
The wounds they dealt—how long they kept in check
Dynamic pressure of the Christian lie
That men are equal in the sight of God!
Sir T. Men are not equal, and there is no God.
St. J. They are not equal, and there is no God.
And when the myth of Heaven-and-Hell—the valves
Wherein the world lay like an oyster pearled
With the soul of man: when this great fable gaped
And fell away, the lethal meaning, hid
In Christian tenets, like a serpent brood
Uncoiled, as rancour, decadence, despair,
In revolutions, anarchies, nihilisms,
A will to end the world. There stand we now,
Naked against the Universe.

Sir T. The truth
About the lie! The double carapace
Of Heaven-and-Hell sloughed off, mankind remains
A houseless mollusc.
St. J. Pitiful to see!
Imagination—let me use that word
Instead of soul; and let it mean entire
The powers of blood and nerve, of heart and brain,
And aught occult and undiscovered yet
In carnate matter: Imagination, not
Conceiving what has happened in the world,
Much wonders at the darkness and the cold.
How simple, how appalling, how secure
Were Heaven and Hell; what fathomless content
In that deep home of penitential fire,
That everlasting, joyful holiday
In golden streets lit by the glory of God!
Sir T. Will the great heart of the world be great enough
To bid that dream avaunt once and for ever?
St. J. It will, it must, though it should come with wars,
Convulsions, burnings, tortures, massacres,
With centuries of woe employing all
Prodigious powers of slaughter, powers of pain,
Wherein our civilized self-consciousness
Outdoes barbarity and instinct far
Beyond comparisons of Heaven and Hell.
Sir T. With wars, with woes? You think the change will be
A long elaborate travail?
St. J. I cannot tell.
Sir T. But God and Sin and Heaven and Hell that *are* not

Are yet the very texture of the world.

St. J. Kings, magistracies, warriors, learning, love
Being knit in Heaven and Hell, in God and Sin,
Like blood, nerve, sinew, bone in living flesh,
It may be that the change will come about
As human bodies alter in seven years time——

Sir. T. In seven years' time!

St. J. No, no; no prophecy!
I mean the change may be a growth unfelt,
Or else the whole world may collapse at once,
(The rotten flesh unable to sustain
The bones, enmesh the nerves, confine the blood)
And cease to be—ashamed to be
Less than immortal and the special care
Of God, Omnipotent, Omniscient; God,
Lover, avenger, maker and destroyer.

Sir T. No! man is greater than to make an end
Because his God forsook him.

St. J. I think so, too;
And in my heart believe terrific war
Will burst the chrysalis, the Christendom
That hangs in rags about the eager soul,
Already winged and rich with crimson stains,
With sulphur plumes and violet, green and gold,
Psyche at last, pure Matter of itself.

Sir T. Psyche? Imagination.

St. J. It was my word:
Imagination be it!

Sir T. Naked against
A godless universe, with what, by whom
Must we be clothed?

St. J. Heaven, Hell and God and Sin

Were but a symbol of the Universe,
A lie wherein to wrap the babyhood
Of man's imagination, which is itself
The Universe become self-conscious. That's
The whole; there is no more to say: with all
The Universe, which *is* imagination
Become in life a consciousness, in soul
Self-conscious (still I say it, and again,
And yet again it must be said): with all
The Universe itself, no symbols now,
Imagination must be clad and armed.

Sir T. The terror and the splendour of it thrill
Me through and through. I feel it: this is great;
This is the greatest.

St. J. Great and most terrible!
I shrink, I quail; the burden weighs me down;
The agony dissolves me: this is fear;
This, mystery. Legends of creation, tales—
(As if the Universe could have been *made*
In any sense mankind can give the word!)
Fantastic myths of virgins bearing boys,
And of a desperate God who gave his son
To die upon a tree—how foul a thing!—
Of dead men come alive, and signs and shows
Of tongues and thunders, cures and stigmata:
These are no mystery, but the quaint alarm
Of ignorance that harnessed vision against
The things that be in sterile dreams of spirit,
As banal, venomous-moral, hard and fast
As Matter is mysterious, fluent, pure,
Filling the Universe with miracle,
Filling and being the Universe itself.

Sir T. This makes my whole life horrible.
St. J. Most lives,
Confronting this, will shrivel into dust.
Sir T. I've never lived.
St. J. That is, you've never thought,
Never imagined.
Sir T. Never! A phantom life,
The actor's; spell-bound drudgery chained
And eyeless. What a ruthless tyrant public
Opinion is—an armed automaton
That fells its victims blindly! Entertain
A motley audience for a livelihood
You never make; be this, be that—a fop,
A fool, a hero, or a villain; lose
Conceit of everything except applause;
Be certain of success when self-contempt
Assures you that you play a popular part;
Be courteous to the bully, bland with fools—
The dreadful folk that haunt celebrities,
That haunt theatrical celebrities;
Be genial with the newsman—glad to see him;
Civil to greedy playwrights, artists, cads
And cadgers, leeches, lice and vampire-bats
That bleed the theatre; everybody's body;
Charity, politics, church—their humble servant;
And nightly the performance in the cage
Before the assorted multitude
Of people, people, people: this, and worse;
Then death and swift oblivion: nothing done;
Nothing at all to be remembered by:
No other noise so big as stage renown
Is silenced utterly by death.

St. J. No fame
Outlasts the world: there lives the hope of man:
Death's meaning is that consciousness shall cease,
The earth be purged of life; thus in the end
All men are equal, matter pure from taint
Of anguish; in the nebula become
Essential fire, free from solicitude.
This is the freedom of the Universe.

Sir T. Matter grown anxious: that is very man.

St. J. Therefore the player's is an envied lot:
No other artist so intensely lives
In the world's consciousness.

Sir T. But after death?

St. J. Dread nothing that can happen after death:
The world will cease: live in that thought, that mood,
Upon the eternal moment.

Sir T. But to mark
The world before one dies!

St. J. The inmost hope
Of all men! I believe that you and I
Could orientate the world's imagination;
And that would make a mark.

Sir T. Tell me of that!
The whole thing stirs me: tell me more of that!
First have I grasped your meaning? All the past,
Religion, drama, art is dead to us,
Because we know that all is Matter, all
Imagination, beauty, passion, power
Through time and times and changing suns and orbs
From spacious nebula to nebula.
This is the freedom of the Universe
Wherein imagination must delight,

Now that Olympus, Asgard, Heaven and Hell,
Gods, God and separate soul are dead and done.
St. J. My meaning; yes. Material Heaven and Hell,
Olympus, Hades, Asgard, Nifelheim
Are Matter's memories of pellucid fire
It once was and will be, an evidence
Of our material nature wrapped in myth
Unconsciously. Imagination lives
In Matter, being itself material power,
Irradiant, telepathic, magical,
Imponderable as lightning or the light,
Ethereal essence of the Universe.
To free this power from twenty centuries
Of God and Sin; endow it with its own,
The infinite Universe; to launch the world
In space again upon a virgin track
As though the foul old rut and blood-drenched way
Had never been! Oh, Tristram! Help me—you!
It can be done!
Sir T. How can I help you, Gervase?
St. J. I want your stage. A while ago you said
A people has a drama only once:
From "Gorboduc" to "The Tempest" fifty years;
And nothing since. The deadly truth of that
Perturbed me; and I feared my eastern work—
A play I made wherein dynamic art
Of Matter rives asunder all the scale
Of being; restrings the lyre, and sets the tune
Anew: I feared this work was wasted; now,
Having thought it out—even while we talked, my mind
Was labouring with it—that foolish fear is dead.
Twice in the past transcendent drama flowered,

A people's crowning glory. First in Greece:
A mighty triad and a rhythmic scroll,
Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides.
Sir T. Euripides? A decadent, I thought.
St. J. Matter knows nothing of decadence, a word
Corrupt with spirit: only chance and change,
Power and imagination. Let me speak.—
The war with Persia, Marathon, Salamis,
Battles and victories by land and sea,
Revived in Attic bosoms, Attic brains,
Profound regard for things of Attica,
With ardent interest in the Universe
Whereof it felt itself the heart and soul.
In England next after two thousand years,
The most instinctive people in the world,
The mightiest and the freest, having undone
With axe and fire the strangling Roman creed,
That like a caul about their fancy clung,
Forthwith despatched to hell the rivalry
Of Spain, redeemed the seas, began to stretch
Their giant limbs in isles and continents,
And take the measure of the quartered globe.
Thus the imagination of these lands
Became one living cord, whereon were strung
All story, legend, lore; and like a birth
Miraculous, divine dramatic art,
Which to be truly great demands a great
Impassioned people for an audience, rose
From out the loftiest minds and shaped itself
The mirror of a master people's pride.
And now a greater England about to break
The husk of Christendom, as in its youth

It sloughed off Rome, begins the world anew,
Imperial England of itself aware,
And man, the conscience of the Universe.
I mean to spend my fortune and my life
In the high service of imagination
For England's sake and man's. The dreams, the lore,
The rags and rust of thirty centuries:
To cast these wholly, and accoutre man
In all the beauty, splendour, scope and power
Of this material, eternal fate,
The Universe, whereof he is the nerve—
The inmost fibre, flowering in brain and blood!
For this I would give up my life in pain.
Sir T. This will I help you in with all my power:
It dazzles me; it seizes on my soul.
St. J. A greater drama than the world has known
Is shrouded here in darkness.
Sir T. We must knead
The public mind into the shape of this
To make it possible. The play's the thing!
St. J. Yes; not the pulpit, not the press: the play,
Loftier and broader than religious rites,
The mirror of an empire's pride, of man's
Imagination, from the past released,
Dowered with the freedom of the Universe.
Sir T. What will this drama be?
St. J. I cannot tell.
My own play is the first step in a path
Untrodden. At the journey's end I see
A new world purged of God and purged of Sin,
Where men are healthy, women beautiful,
All men, all women, beautiful and strong.

Re-enter LADY SUMNER.

Sir T. Martha! How like a ghost you steal upon us!
Where have you been?
Lady S. The streets, the squares, the river;
No home to go to! Wandering in the night
I saw your windows lit, and knew: I knew
You plotted here. What will you do? You're not
About to send me anywhere! I'll die;
I mean to die. I wanted Tristram too;
But I can die alone: time—give me time!
It's hard, it's very hard: you wish me gone,
And cannot understand how hard it is:
I have no children, and my husband hates me.
St. J. You *have* your children.
Lady S. Mock me not with that:
You know as well as I that death ends all.
St. J. Nothing can end. The mystery Matter, lasts
For ever.
Lady S. Am I mad, indeed, or you?
What are you talking of? My soul—my soul
It is, that's up in arms against the world.
St. J. If death ends all, what is the soul?
Lady S. My soul
Is me, one aching nerve from head to foot.
St. J. How is it clad, your soul? What atmosphere
Environs it, wherein does it consist?
Lady S. Naked my soul is; and it cannot breathe
For lack of air; and it consists in sin.
St. J. In sin?
Lady S. Dead sin, it cannot now commit.
Sir T. Now Gervase; put your message to the test.

St. J. There is no sin. Be silent, Martha! Fear,
Despondency, decay, the will to die
Should neither speak nor think, but fling themselves
Upon the Universe. Be silent! Let
My meaning touch your nerves. Attempt not
Apprehension: feel what I say.—This sense
Of sin is ignorance only; every voice
Must thunder that, and every intellect
Record it, every heart delight to hoard
The knowledge till the tissue of the world,
Engrained with truth, be guiltless in conceit
As in effect it is. Here we are left
Unfriended on the surface, far from home;
And that imagination which we are,
Betrayed and lost on this outlandish earth,
Believes itself to blame; but neither man
Nor Matter's answerable: the Universe
Is a becoming, a passion and a pain,
A rapt imagination. Purge yourself
Of God, of Heaven and Hell, of soul and sin,
Of small humanities, fantastic moods,
Putridities of spirit, posies, myths;
For all these dreams will leave you when you die.
Be Matter pure as flame.

Lady S. My soul, my soul!
It springs from God: there once was God.

St. J. No God:
God hitherto has been the world's excuse,
The shadow of man that tripped him everywhere,
A phantom cul-de-sac in the Universe,
A dog in the manger. Men need no excuse:
If they must be, they must be what they are.

Lady S. And what are they?

St. J. I told you: Matter, once
Inherent in the nebula that cooled,
Contracted, and became the sun and us.
Out of the bowels of the earth we rise:
Though in that thought at home and happy enough,
Yet there imagination feels itself
The merest parvenu when it recalls
Incalculable ages throbbed away
Within the glistering fire diaphanous
That filled the deep conceiving womb of space;
And on the earth, upon the surface here,
No longer than a week-end visit seems
Its spectral period hitherto, beside
That sojourn in the cooling globe, and date
Without beginning in the pristine fire.

Lady S. I feel a meaning, Gervase, I feel a power
More beautiful than God. How stale God seems
Upon a sudden and how ugly!

St. J. Of a truth
God is an ugly dream, whate'er it meant
At one time.

Lady S. Who made us then?

St. J. We were not made.
I told you, Martha; it is man that makes—
And birds and beavers, spiders, bees and ants;
All conscious Matter makes and mars a little:
But of the staple of the Universe,
Unconscious Matter, what we know is this:
That it becomes in systems, suns and earths,
In plants and beasts and men, a Universe.

Lady S. That seems more wonderful than to be made:

I feel it may be true. But, oh, dear Gervase,
What is the use, what is the end of it?

St. J. No end, and no beginning anywhere:
Only eternity, eternal Matter
And Matter's form, imagination—No;
Not form: how metaphysic tarnishes
A simple word! Only imagination,
The most exalted name of Matter, wrought
From flame to ice, from ice again to flame
Through suns and planets, verdure, battle, blood,
Degrees of being, and miracles of change.

Lady S. Why should it be? What purpose can it serve?

St. J. It must be, since it is; and must be *so*,
Or certainly it would be otherwise.
It serves no purpose, it is beautiful:
That is the whole. Your children, dead, had no
Beginning and will have no end. They once
Were fire; that fire, transmuted into love,
Distilled them from your womb, and was
Itself your children: cooled again, it rests
In earth, and will be limpid fire once more,
When all the orbs that hang about the sun
Return into its bosom, or other radiant
Passion of Matter impregnate space anew.

Lady S. I need not die then, since I cannot end?

St. J. Oh now my brain rejoices! Terror lurked
Beneath that white austerity of mine,
Lest when I tried my message in the fire—
The first time: true; but with a woman, and one
Whom dread of death and fancied need of death
Kindles to any news and change of mood:

I say, I feared lest your intense despair,
That gilds my truth at once, should burn it up.
But now you think there never can be need
For terror, doubt, or agony of mind
In presence of a sinless Universe,
Where all is mystery, all imagination,
All beauty, passion, power unending, all
The purest Matter.

Lady S. I can live; but where?
Where can I find a home for this new thought?
Not in the theatre, not in the church,
Not in the houses or the books of men!

St. J. I have a mansion in a forest-aisle
Where a deep silence, intimately felt,
And poignant as a perfume, like a mode
Of subtle splendour evermore becomes.
A green and branching honeycomb of glades,
A sylvan city clusters round my house;
And near it in an arbour sancro-sanct,
A chapelle ardent of the forest, lies
In state a famous memory. There it was
The queen of the Iceni stood at bay,
A desperate hind against the Roman pack,
In that last battle of her overthrow.
The trench she dug, the mound she reared are held
By oak and beech; but in this inmost bower
Beside her camp forlorn, this secret haunt
Of emerald shadow, emerald light, a crypt
Of living silence, sculptured boscage, turf
That gathers incense from the generous earth,
There on this virgin ground, a green and bronze
Carpet of fragrancies and couch of state,

These doomed things are enshrined.
Lady S. I might begin
To live again in such a woodland haven,
If I were free.
St. J. What freedom can you want
More than the freedom of the universe?
Lady S. The freedom of the Universe!
St. J. Whereof
My message is the charter.
Lady S. But my husband?
Sir T. You have no husband now. Let Gervase speak
His precept of divorce.
Lady S. No husband now?
Sir T. A prophetess of failure who fulfils
Her prophecy against her husband, severs
The marriage-bond.
Lady S. I knew not what I did!
Oh, Tristram!
St. J. Martha!... Tristram, take her hand!
[SIR TRISTRAM *and* LADY SUMNER *join hands.*
The speech of men is so corrupt with dreams,
Forgotten alchemy and astral lies,
So rank with spirit and the cult of God
That nothing can be said as it is known.
In the pure matter of sex, befouled with words
Of sanction supererogant, I use
The most material language to pronounce
Divorce between you. Since the pride of life
Is dead in you, the woman, and your seed
Restored to that profound unconsciousness
Which is the general mode of the Universe,
Nothing constrains you to consider him

With whom you spent yourself courageously:
Mind and imagination now are one
With Matter; and this privilege is yours,
To know alive the deep delight of death.
For you, the man, in whom the pride of life
Intensely burns, this woman is no mate.
Your art will claim you body, brain, and sex
Without a rival henceforth.—Man and wife
You are no longer. Let your hands disjoined
Witness divorce between you.

[SIR TRISTRAM *releases* LADY SUMNER'S *hand.*

Lady S. Was there once
A thing called love? Oh, love! Death—death and hell.

St. J. You drink the dead sea.

Lady S. Dead.

St. J. Yet you will live.
My car is waiting: through the silent town,
The silent city and the lamplit night,
Watched by the star-attended moon, half seen
Behind her cloudy lattice in the skies,
Our wind-shod wheels shall bear us speedily.

Lady S. What call have I to go?

St. J. The call of night,
By sleepless fancies heard and souls set free.
The forest calls you in your blood and brain:
Like spell-bound tides the billowy woodlands sleep;
Through labyrinthine thickets pencilled beams
Explode in silvery silence; far withdrawn
Behind the darknesses of clustered boles
The emerald forest moonshine glances clear,
Imprisoned wells of light. Come, Martha, come.

Lady S. The woods will cover me and hide me close.

St. J. Come, sister, come.
Lady S. I come.
St. J. Good night.
Sir T. Good night.
To-morrow, Gervase, bring your tragedy.
St. J. My play? No tragedy; a triumph, Tristram.
Sir T. A triumph may it be! Again, good night.
St. J. Good night.
Lady S. Farewell.
Sir T. Farewell. Be free; be happy.
[ST. JAMES'S *and* LADY SUMNER *go out.*
I must have money. [*Opens the door of the Business-room, turns up the light, and discovers* EUROPA *asleep.*] Pride of life, pure sex,
Dreaming and roseate! Trick of the night, and sleep
Pretended? Smiles! . . . . . Europa! No; she breathes
With parted lips, her nostrils, carved and sweet
As immortelles of pearl, too delicate
To fill in slumber's heedless anarchy
Her rhythmic bosom's vaulted depths; her arms
Hang listless, and her limbs beneath her gown
Are like the gates of heaven, ajar. Superb
She-creature this! She looked desire to-day;
To-night her will effects the shortest way.
I must have money. [*Having removed* EUROPA'S *clothes from the desk he is about to open it, when* EUROPA *wakens and looks about.*] Beautiful of you
To be here on the instant that my life
Begins again! You overheard?
Europa. Not all;
I slept. Your bishop with the sorcerer's voice

Of silver thrilled me first, then charmed my heart
With deep material news that brought to life
Dead dreams of mine. I want to be myself
For this one night; not the smart actress, vulgar
Business-woman that fights or smooths her way
With scorn or kisses as the battle bends,
But Matter, pure and passionate—as I am.

Sir T. St. James's message falls on fertile ground!

Europa. He says a thing there that will move the world.

Sir T. Where shall I take you to?

Europa. Come home with me.

Sir T. You think that will be best? Why do you wear
Your costume still?

Europa. I am a woman such
As Cressid was, an amateur of men;
Never inconstant while her passion lasts,
But not to be compelled by love or law.
The name I hate most in the world is wife;
And the professional drudgery of the blood
Which marriage is, seems to me hell on earth.

Sir T. Not always hell. What do you know of marriage?

Europa. I had a husband in the States.

Sir T. Divorced?

Europa. Better than that: killed in the Cuban war.

Sir T. Why do you wear your costume still?

Europa. Because
The drapery becomes me; and I meant
To change its folds for other clinging folds
Before I dressed.

Sir T. Here in the theatre?

Europa. How could I tell you would be free to spend
The night with me?
Sir T. Am I the kind of man
You take me for?
Europa. What do I take you for?
Sir T. A fool, I think.
Europa. Oh, have I overdone it?
I thought you loved the pure Material truth.
I will be difficult at once!
Sir T. Too late,
Europa.
Europa. Why? What can you not forgive?
I came; you found me sleeping, and were glad.
Sir T. The sweetest action may be spoiled by speech:
A thing no woman ever understands.
Europa. What *have* I said? Correct me, punish me!
I spoke too soon; my mind is scarce awake.
Sir T. How brutal women are, how cynical!
I've never known a tender-hearted woman.
Europa. Hard as a diamond am I; and my love
A jewelled flame: high hearts are always hard.
Souls lapped in cotton wool are not for me!
Sir T. Now comes the diatribe! No woman yet
Could keep her temper past a word or two!
Europa. You struck the flint and you shall feel the fire.
I find you as I find the rest of men,
Obtuse, distrustful, flabby, impotent;
Fit to beget a fool or two at home,
And dribble out uncomfortable lives
In parliaments and stalls and smoking-rooms.
It's iron women love—Damascus blades,
Not bludgeons of the theatre stuffed with rags.

Sir T. How often have you said that? Reel-and-rote,
A parrot speech! So all viragoes scold
Since Eve dared Adam. Come; a different tune.
Europa. What? *Are* you strong, Sir Tristram? *Are* you strong?
Power in a man I worship: show me power.
Sir T. Go to your room and leave your costume there.
Europa. Give me my clothes, then.
Sir T. No; come back for them.
Europa. But I shall be half naked.
Sir T. What of that?
Europa. Will you attend me to my room?
Sir T. Not I.
Europa. The passages are dark.
Sir T. You know the way.
Europa. I know the way! This is a kind of strength;
But, sir, I'm not defeated.
Sir T. No?
Europa. Not yet.
When I return we shall resume the fight:
Since you're so masterful, I must be won. [*Goes out.*
Sir T. The cureless wound of sex that nature dealt
Gives man the victory still. If women knew
The tenth part of their power while passion lasts!
[*Opens the desk and takes from a secret drawer a handful of bank-notes.*

A MONTH ELAPSES

ACT IV

SCENE: *Sir Tristram Sumner's Reception-room in the Grosvenor Theatre, as in Act III.* HILDRETH *is sitting at a table with letters. Enter* ABBOT.

Abbot. Not yet?
Hildreth. No, Abbot.

Enter SALERNE.

Salerne. Has he come?
Hildreth. Not yet.
Salerne. What says your mercury, Abbot?
Abbot. Zero, zero!
Salerne. I think myself the play will fail.
Hildreth. I don't.
The naïvety, novelty, audacity;
The this, the that that people prattle of;
The Bishop's name, the scandal, and the cry,
The noise of the event will bring it off.
Abbot. I doubt it; and I think Sir Tristram scents
Disaster in the air.
Salerne. Never before
Do I remember such a slipshod time
As this vile month has been. Sir Tristram's hand
Is out: his eye untrue; such staging, such
A tangled skein, dropped stitches everywhere;

Warped wood and crumbling walls! The play's quite
good;
But for the cast, the acting and the scene—
Give me a fit-up company astray
And starving in the potteries, and I'll whip
The top to such a purpose in a week
That this fine Grosvenor corps would drown itself
En masse to see such art in castaways.

Hildreth. Salerne, you've been with Groom! I know
the sound;
That man's a malady; a passing thought
Of him will sometimes start the dullest brain
On venturous speeches.

Salerne. Start the dullest brain?

Hildreth. Like mine, I mean.

Salerne. Ah.—Yes; I've been with Groom.
He's drinking Burgundy in the "Rose and Crown."
Poor Groom! The one great actor of our time.
Finest since Garrick I should say.

Abbot. And I.

Hildreth. Come, come; no treason! Groom is very
well;
But we're Sir Tristram's men.

Salerne. And loyal still!

Abbot. Oh, loyal enough! Sir Tristram needs it too.
I'd burn his bishop in Smithfield if I could. [*Goes out.*

Salerne. Why is he late?

Hildreth. You know as much as I.

Salerne. Infer as much?

Hildreth. I'll not discuss the matter.

Salerne. You're too devoted, Hildreth. Some one
comes.

Hildreth. That's not his step.

Salerne. [*Looking out*] The Bishop! Curse his cloth!
[*Goes out.*

Enter ST. JAMES'S.

St. J. Good evening, Hildreth. Is Sir Tristram here?

Hildreth. Not yet, my lord.

St. J. At what time is he due?

Hildreth. He's overdue, my lord.

St. J. Unlike him that.

Hildreth. Unlike him? Yes; a month ago.

St. J. A month?

Hildreth. May I speak freely?

St. J. Speak without reserve
If it concerns the welfare of my friend.

Hildreth. My lord, most intimately. For a month
His leading lady has led him by the nose.

St. J. Europa Troop: familiar at rehearsal;
But that I thought the method of the stage.

Hildreth. Oh no, my lord. Sir Tristram kept a state
About him always till the change began.

St. J. What change?

Hildreth. The change from promptitude and ease
To absence, fear, perplexity in all
He does.

St. J. Unjust! Consideration, care,
An artist's terror; but mastery of his work.

Hildreth. Pardon, my lord. I love him, and I know.
The definite purpose, the consummate skill
That made his management a royal game
Have left him; and he stumbles to the goal,
Which once he reached unerring and direct
As wireless news or planetary light.

St. J. Fine of you, Hildreth! But I think the play
Replies for all Sir Tristram's hesitance.

Hildreth. Partly, my lord: the play is difficult.

St. J. Where is he now?

Hildreth. None of us know, my lord.
I dread mischance.

St. J. On what conjecture, Hildreth?

Hildreth. The vaguest: at his house, no word of him;
And at his club, no word.

St. J. That means no more
Than this: he was not home nor at his club.

Hildreth. Yes, but, my lord, the first night of a play!
Not in the history of the theatre——

Enter SIR TRISTRAM

St. J. No more foreboding, Hildreth!

Sir T. Gervase! High
On Heaven's dark brow we'll hang your name to-night.
[*Looking over the letters.*
Bills: invitations. Why should people charge
Each other for the things they need; and why
Should one man want to meet another man?
We know what men are. In a million, one
May have the right to meet his fellows—No;
Not one in twenty millions! Men deserve
Each other's scorn. — There's nothing, Hildreth,
nothing.

Hildreth. Sir Tristram, I implore you!

Sir T. Leave us, Hildreth.
You shall command me when the curtain falls.
You please me always, Hildreth. [HILDRETH *goes out.*

St. J. So distraught!

You're like a woman, Tristram.
Sir T. A woman? True:
Old men are like old women. Don't we know
How age makes neuters of us? All alike
Unhappy; cold and bloodless, curst and shrill!
St. J. I understand! The black rings round your eyes—
Court mourning for a day of passion, spent
In some shameless bosom! Once you could drain
The fount of energy as genial men
Will do, may do; but when the world appears
Thereafter like a desolate seaboard stripped
At ebb of tide, men must begin to spare
Their native power: the nerves are perilous things
To sport with: palsy a price exorbitant
For passing pleasure: to adventure youth
Throughout one's life—why, Tristram, that's
To burn the candle in the middle too!
Sir T. I burnt
A torch to-day to Aphrodite: yes;
And burnt it out: the more fool I; for love
Should leave a gathering coal. I know, I know!
But fear not you; my unclogged intellect
Will fling the prophet's part I play to-night
Across the footlights like a shower of stars,
Of falling stars.
St. J. Distort not hazardous tropes
To evil omens!
Sir T. Expect no triumph, Gervase.
A stormy night; shipwreck, perhaps.
St. J. At least
My prologue will compel a tolerant mood.

Sir T. A paying audience tolerant! Money's worth;
They come to be arrested, entertained.
Your speech will goad a curiosity
Already piqued. The play's a great event,
No doubt; but your success may be the world's
Defeat.

St. J. The world's defeat?

Sir T. By which I mean
You come a hundred years before your time.

St. J. You must not think, nor feel that! Heart and brain
The world is with us, waiting for our word.

Sir T. The world is waiting always for the word
It must obey, the news it must believe;
But never recognizes what it needs,
And worships only craft and jugglery.
It loves to see a well-known trick performed
Another way, to hear an old lie told
Divertingly in some fresh parable.

St. J. That's not the great mood, Tristram.

Sir T. No; it's war:
Behind, the great idea; here, in front,
The petty detail and order of the night.
Remember your prediction: You believe
Terrific war will burst the chrysalis,
The Christendom that hangs in filthy rags
About the eager soul already winged
With crimson plumes and violet, green and gold,
Psyche at last, pure Matter of itself,
Imagination, free of the Universe.
With words and shows equipped we wage great war,
And here to-night deliver battle. Temple!

Enter TEMPLE *from the Dressing-room.*

Wine,
Heroic brandy, or the water of life? . . .
Champagne for me. . . . Nothing? To toast the play!

St. J. That's not my mood at all!

Sir T. Nor is it mine!
The shimmering surface of the player's life
Is all he flaunts when most his soul is stirred.
He turns the silver lining to the world;
The tempest and the darkness where he breeds
His high ostents and subtleties of art
Are hidden. Who can tell what tragic mirth
May occupy the other side of the moon?

St. J. Fill up for me too, Temple! I forget
In this erect and seminal thought of mine
That men are many-sided. I toast the war
Our play proclaims to-night.

[TEMPLE, *having filled two tumblers with champagne, returns to the Dressing-room.* SIR TRISTRAM *and* ST. JAMES'S *drink.*

Sir T. The war of wars!

St. J. A century, a millennium of war
Against the sin and sacro-sanctity
That holds the world in thrall and hides from man
His true material being.

[ROUSE *appears at the door of the Reception-room.*

Rouse. The overture,
My lord. [*Disappears.*

St. J. I come, I come.—Strange fear perturbs
Me suddenly.

Sir T. But that's a certain sign
Of perfect power. The house will welcome you:
We love frank courage still.

St. J. Courage? What courage?
Having some gift of oratory, I
Deliver my own prologue. Courage once
Took heart in men when those who thought and spake
Were racked and roasted: this attempt
Exacts effrontery: not courage.

Sir T. Say
Effrontery: you do it; it is yours;
A piece of you: accept it; love it therefore.

St. J. A shamefulness attends this thing. The house
Will hiss me, Tristram.

Sir T. No; your fervid voice
Will mould and temper to delight the crude
Anticipation of the audience. Speak
Like one inspired; speak, Gervase, like yourself.

[ST. JAMES'S *goes out.*

Now, Temple, quickly!

[*As* SIR TRISTRAM *crosses to his Dressing-room* EUROPA TROOP *enters, dressed for her part.*

Europa. Tristram! Tristram! See
How beautiful I am! Not dressed yet! Fie!
Kiss me; my bosom. Are you tired of me?
I pout then! Dear, to-day: so good you were
That I can think of nothing in the world
But to be yours; and you must come to-night!
My love is inexhaustible: as like
Irradiant metal that scatters momently
Its multitudinous lustre, as summer-time

Is like the month of June: the more it spends
The more it has to spend. [*Opens the door of the Business-room and turns up the light.*] And, dear, I need
Some money; men with bills molested me
As I came up the stairs; the attendants here
Relax their duties sadly: I believe
They're not above a bribe.

[SIR TRISTRAM *closes the door of his Dressing-room, and takes from the secret drawer in the Business-room some bank-notes, which he hands to* EUROPA.

Europa. How much?

Sir T. The whole!
You've had it all. This was a treacherous hoard,
And rightly spent on you. In any way
Of honest business, or dishonest art,
It had been worse than lost, like fairy gold
That turns to shreds of flint when daylight kills
Its phantom glory. It was wisely spent.
We have obliged each other.

[SIR TRISTRAM *enters his Dressing-room, and speaks from it unseen.*

Europa. How hard you are!
Harder than me. But you will come to-night?

Sir T. Perhaps. You know this splendid play will fail.

Europa. Our parts will save it, Tristram; you and I.
What chiming prattle do we love to hear—
"The play is nothing; but the acting? Ah,
"Sir Tristram! Oh, Europa!" Stupid plays
Are what we want, with skeletons to drape
In flesh and blood of us. You'll come to-night?

Sir T. If the play fails?

Europa. Can't I console you, Tristram?
Sir T. If it succeeds?
Europa. You triumph in my arms.
Sir T. Not tired of me?
Europa. Not nearly! Hateful word!
Are *you* tired, Tristram?
Sir T. A little, of myself.
Europa. Come home with me to-night, and you shall fall
In love with Tristram Sumner. I have charms
Beyond belief to make men love themselves.
You come?
Sir T. I come.
Europa. The coda, Tristram! Quick!
Clang, clash, sapristi, pomb! The overture
Is over. I must hear St. James's speak
His prologue.
Sir T. Do. And send me word at once
How they receive him.
Europa. I shall send my love
A message of episcopal debuts,
Episcopal debuts, episcopal—— [*Goes out.*

Enter LADY SUMNER.

Sir T. [*Still from his Dressing-room*] That some one?
Lady S. Yes.
Sir T. Who is it?
Lady S. One you wished
Never to see again.
Sir T. My wife!
Lady S. That was.
I came in haste. I had a deep resolve;

But all my purpose crumbled as I passed
Europa Troop in the corridor.

Sir T. [*At the door of his Dressing-room*] Who else!
What other actress could you hope to meet?
She takes the heroine in our play to-night.

Lady S. Your mistress, Tristram: I could tell at once.

Sir T. After the play: I cannot see you now.
[*Withdraws into the Dressing-room.*

Lady S. "Do you know that Warwick Groom and
"Martha Sackville were lovers? She visited him
"every night in his dressing-room at the Parthenon
"when he played Romeo——"

Sir T. [*Entering the Reception-room and closing the door of the Dressing-room.*] Give me that letter!

Lady S. It's bitten in my brain.—
"—And the reason why he insisted on beginning the
"fourth act with the fifth scene of the third act was
"the reason you guess at once: it gave them time.
"But that was not the only place in the play where
"they performed their private intermede. How this
"was managed? Ask old Odham, Groom's dresser."

Sir T. You stole that letter.

Lady S. I stole it.

Sir T. Give it me.

Lady S. I burnt it in the forest: the flame of it
Was like a passion-flower.

Sir T. That crude account
Of nauseous lust!

Lady S. Nothing is nauseous men
And women do in any mood at all.
But to be old and done—that's nauseous; worse
Than death. Why can't we die by taking thought?

Sir T. Who wrote it?
Lady S. Odham himself. I knew his hand.
Sir T. How was this managed? Um? You won't?
You must!
Odham, being ill and bribed, you took his place,
A substitute, in male attire?
Lady S. I did!
How have you guessed it, Tristram?
Sir T. Could there be
A way besides as simple—and secure!
The infantile device of Cupid, blind
Betrayer of himself! Old Odham spied:
He saw you in Warwick's arms between the acts.
A pleasant memory!
Lady S. I have faced it all.
Sir T. Why are you come?
Lady S. I came like destiny,
Prepared and armed with power and purpose, gained
In the forest. But I met your mistress: fate
Of worlds and women is shifted by such straws.

Re-enter HILDRETH.

Sir T. Back to the forest, then.—What is it, Hildreth?
Hildreth. St. James's triumphs.
Sir T. And without offence?
No protest?
Hildreth. None. A section seemed at first
In tune for ribaldry; but soon his clear
Goodwill, the nerve and music of his voice,
His gracious looks and speech secured the house.
The gallery points his periods with applause;
The stalls sit purring like a catshow charmed

With extra cream or chin adroitly scratched;
And women from the boxes lean and listen
Like cows across a gate at milking-time.
Sir T. The house is fused then?
Hildreth. Mob at once, well pleased
With anything.
Sir T. And well begun's half done!
The prologue's over?
Hildreth. No. I meant to note
The finish; but Europa Troop despatched
Immediate news. She said——

Re-enter EUROPA TROOP.

Europa. Too soon, too soon!
Oh, Tristram! — Pardon, madam — Applause has whirled
St. James's to the skies. He stands entranced,
With face uplifted like a seraph, pealing
Material music, from his prologue worlds
Away. Into the nebula! The house
Sits up and holds its breath.

Re-enter ABBOT.

Abbot. Sir Tristram, come!
In Heaven's name come! St. James's spreads himself
Worse than we ever heard him; miles beyond
The limits of the play! He must be stopped!

Re-enter SALERNE.

Salerne. You've told him?
Abbot. Yes. The Bishop's broken loose,
Discoursing Matter like a thunderstorm;

A thick brocade and silvery web of rain,
With crash of bells and bolts, while through the loom
A random shuttle of golden lightning plays—
As Warwick might have said.

Salerne. Amenity
To what is happening! "All is Matter, all,"
The Bishop cried, when from the gallery dropped
A question like a bomb, "Hi! What price God?"

Sir T. Olympus felt itself neglected. Well?

Salerne. Then all the blasphemy we've heard him speak
Came trolling forth, "The shutters of the mind;
"A fire-proof curtain: ghastly cul-de-sac;
"A last excuse; sublime taboo; a tip;
"A patent medicine: an accepted lie."
"Atheist!" they cry, "blasphemer!" scourging him
To reckless opposition. There he stands
At every lull in the tempest knelling out
His dogma like a tocsin. What to do
Surpasses me!

Enter MARK BELFRY.

Belfry. God! Crowds believe in God!
My cats, Sir Tristram, what a fool you are!
A fighting parson crossed the floats and all
The stalls came after bellowing—men I mean.
The pittites followed and the gallery boys
Are breaking forms and shying splinters. "God!
"For God!" they roar, parson and moneylender,
Broker and banker, counterjumper, peer.
The women, too; they all believe in God;
Duchesses, milliners, wives and prostitutes,

They scream for God. God pays! you bet! God pays!
They'll wreck your theatre, Tristram; but I'll buy it!
The Grosvenor? Yes; in ruins! I want it. Name
Your figure, Tristram.

Sir T. Where's St. James's?

Belfry. Dead,
I guess, by this time; trampled into pulp.

[LADY SUMNER *sinks fainting on the couch unnoticed by the others.*

Sir T. My Gervase! God forbid! Abbot, Salerne,
Darken the theatre. Let the orchestra
Strike up a blaring march. We'll clear the stage,
And play St. James's play. Come after me!

Belfry. Cash, Tristram, cash! You know you're ruined. Name
Your price. I want the Grosvenor Theatre—and I'll——

[SIR TRISTRAM *goes out, followed by everybody except* LADY SUMNER.

Enter WARWICK GROOM.

Groom. Martha! To meet you here! . . . Sleeping? A swoon!

[*He raises her to a sitting posture, and she begins to revive. As she breathes with difficulty he unfastens her cloak, and finds her dressed like a boy.*

Lady S. Oh, Warwick, are we dead? My throat is parched
Enough for hell. [*He breaks the neck of a bottle of champagne, fills a tumbler, and gives her to drink*]
Alive still in the world
Of lust and lush! Oh, Warwick, strike me, hurt me!

My withered fancy flounders in the mire;
My memory chooses words I never loved,
Ideas foreign to my prime. Pure pain,
Absorbing every sense, would clean my soul.—
Is this the Parthenon or the Grosvenor, Warwick?

Groom. The Grosvenor, Martha.

Lady S. Something is happening here.

Groom. Something abnormal for the stage! I passed
Unnoticed in the tumult!

Lady S. Listen, Warwick,
As if you were the Universe itself.
No one would give an ear, or understand;
But you will, Warwick; I belong to you;
You had the bloom and scent, the flower of me.
I think of that unhallowed, holy week
A hundred times a day, a hundred times.
You were my lover, Warwick, and my friend;
My child, my doll: I used to dress you, dear.
I live in that: that wonder-working time,
When all my senses and my soul, aroused
From the sweet slumber of virginity,
Became one instinct and ardour of womanhood.
Lay your proud head upon my bosom, love—
My faded bosom.—Now, my dear, now, now!
If we could fall asleep and never waken.—
Why did I marry Tristram! Why? Not once
Have you demanded that.

Groom. Because I guessed.
He showed me to you——

Lady S. Hush! He did: and more—
He told me you were any woman's man.

Groom. That was true, too.

Lady S. But you adored me, Warwick?
You had a passion for me, a passion, Warwick?
Groom. I loved you then as truly as I love
You now; haggard and worn, or fresh and sweet,
You were and are the woman of my choice;
You only, Martha.
Lady S. And you, my man of men.
Give me some wine again. Will you not drink?

[*They drink; and* LADY SUMNER *sings.*

When I had found a gem I lost
Where none would ever think,
My heart became a cup of wine
I gave my love to drink.

My voice is cracked; but, Warwick, do you know,
There's not a happier woman in the world.
You wonder at my dress? Sit here by me:
I'll tell you pleasantly the whole romance.
And smoke! Do you remember how we quarrelled
About tobacco? You loved it best, you said—
To plague me, Warwick: better than women or wine.
But when I wept you tossed a box away
Of Delicadedzas worth their weight in gold.

[*While* GROOM *turns to the cabinet to choose a cigar,* LADY SUMNER *pours the contents of the vial into her wine.* GROOM *then sits beside her.*

This is the story, Warwick. My husband knew:
Blackmail, or wanton mischief, Odham meant,
And wrote him; but he died, old Odham did,
If you remember, on my wedding-day.
My husband never told me. A month ago
I found old Odham's letter, and knew by it

The fire and fuel of my husband's hate.
My husband loved me long; and I loved him,
Although I married him in a pique at you:
People are made that way: a man and woman
That pig together come to love each other.
Blister my tongue! It is not I that speak—
Only the ruins of me, the broken bits.—
My husband's love being dead and mine being dead—
That kind of love dies out, and when it dies
It's dead indeed, in women: dead love being turned
To festering jealousy and hate in him
By reason of the letter he ignored
When I was young and queen of hearts—I used
To think it beautiful of me to keep
Myself for Tristram: I had, you know,
A thousand lovers, Warwick: is it true
I was as tempting as they said and sang?
Groom. All men adored you, Martha: doubt it not.
Your shape, your walk, your talk, your mouth, your eyes,
Body and soul, all men desired you, dear.
Lady S. I shall die happy, Warwick.—My husband's hate,
My horror of myself were killing me,
When Gervase came, my cousin Gervase; he
Whose play it is to-night. Did some one say
They're trampling him to death? But that can't be!
Groom. Oh, that's impossible!
Lady S. I dreamt it, Warwick.—
My cousin Gervase, bishop and genius, best
Of angels always, with a wonderful
Injunction from the Universe, a most

Authentic mandate, severed us; and me
He carried to the forest, there to clothe
My naked fancy with the Universe,
A sinless, Godless Universe of his.
It seems to me a matter of little moment
Whether there is a God or not; but Sin
Is great—the greatest: all is death save Sin:
That is *my* message, Warwick! Every one
Must have a message now: the only way
To individualize. Warwick, have *you*
A message?

Groom. I have a message, Martha: one
I shall deliver shortly.

Lady S. Tell it now.

Groom. Not now; and not to you.

Lady S. In everything,
My dearest love, you shall be absolute Warwick,
And tell me not, or tell me as you choose.

Groom. I see how much you need to talk. My heart
Is listening: speak your heart out, child.

Lady S. I roamed the forest day and night and fixed
My fancy in the nebula at first.
Profound relief it was to breathe no more
The breath of man and woman, love and hate,
Desire, despair, Heaven, Hell, and God, and Sin:
To be pure soullessness awaiting chance,
My cousin told me of, when all the orbs
That hang about the Sun, and me and mine
Shall fall into its bosom, or other radiant
Passion of Matter impregnate space anew.
But life was not so easily rebuked:
I had that letter; and through the nebula,

As potent rays will pierce substantial things,
It seared itself upon my heart and brain.
My sin tormented me ; and everywhere
Nothing but Sin I saw : concupiscence
Of insect, bird, and beast : bloodstained besides ;
Not only foxes, weasels, falcons, rats,
But blackbirds, thrushes, robins drenched with blood
Of helpless prey and raving drunken songs.
In candelabra where the scented oil
Of honeysuckle burned, I found a crowd
Of shameless couples, male and female, paired—
A brothel of midges, Warwick ; in tender bells
Of chaste convolvuluses spider-wolves
Attacked unhappy bees ; and once I saw
A cheerful skylark chewing a grasshopper
That wriggled like a man being sawn asunder.
I thought of business, policy, pleasure, war,
Where folk devour each other ; and in a flash
I understood that it must still be so :
No man or woman can ever lift a foot
Except to tread and splash in someone's heart.
And out of that my dazzling message sprang,
That Life is the Sin of the Universe. You see?
We do not sin ; we *are* Sin, Warwick. Yes!
It makes the whole world beautiful, I think.
The Sin is great and splendid, deep and high,
Exquisite Sin : physicians feel like this,
Studying a perfect fever, or some disease
It palsies one to think of. Life is Sin,
The wonderful wild Sin of the Universe.—

[*Rises, and walks to the door and back.*

Where was I, Warwick?

Groom. [*Rises*] In the forest, Martha.
Why did you leave it?
Lady S. For a purpose, high
And tender. I took upon myself the Sin
Of the Universe as far as the Universe has sinned
In me; repented of it, and straightway came
To Tristram, intending to confess and be
Forgiven. First I went home, and dressed myself
Once more in these, the wrappage of my sin,
My special sin, my passionate, wilful sin:—
We are the sin of the Universe; but Sin
Itself can sin? Perhaps; I cannot tell.
Groom. You kept these?
Lady S. In a wardrobe, fresh as spring
With yearly lavender. A fitting garb
Of penitence it seemed; a punishment,
A pang, indeed, to show myself to him,
My husband, in the vesture of my love!
Groom. And did you not?
Lady S. No, Warwick, for I met
His mistress at the door, and gentleness
Became malignity.
Groom. But afterwards?
What end did you propose?
Lady S. My death, my death!
Oh, love, I wish to die: I mean to die—
Alone, without regret. That week of Sin
I came here to repent envelopes all
The past and all the future in a cloud
Of glory. At the sight of you my mind,
And that imagination which I am—
Let me remember that: the Universe

Is pure imagination conscious in us:
Most beautiful! The Universe becomes
That week of passionate Sin and hides my soul
As in the pristine fire. Take off my cloak.
[*She advances to the centre of the room.*
GROOM *follows and removes her cloak.*
Am I not beautiful again?
Groom. As fresh
As hawthorn buds, desirable as wine
In summer droughts and molten calentures,
As sweet as bread and meat to starving men!
What miracle is this?
Lady S. The miracle
Of Life triumphant. Drink to Life and Love.
[*They drink.*
It stings a little! . . . Help me, Warwick! Oh!
[*He supports her to the couch, and she sits.*
Groom. You've taken poison? Have I drunk it, too?
Lady S. No, Warwick; I took it all. I want to die.
Help me; embrace me; hold me! Oh, what pain!
Let me lie down. [*He lays her on the couch.*
Inflexible as love,
Death rends and hurts at first; but soon its way
Is like a summer voyage in the south.
What bells are these? That music in the air?
I know!—the stealthy hansoms jingling past
With doors half open, nightly traps to catch
Adventurous lovers. Cafés disengage
Self-centred diners fed and flushed to dream
Of deeds of love in glimmering theatres,
The woman and the man, till it be time
To take each other sweetly. Kiss me, Warwick.

You have your arms about me?

Groom. Yes.

Lady S. I die
Wrapped round about with youth and love and life.
The earth is like a chariot of fire
Wheeling into the Sun. Good night. [*Dies.*

Groom. Good night.
Nothing is wonderful since all is wonder.

[*He covers* LADY SUMNER'S *body with her cloak. Then he takes from his breast-pocket a long sheath-knife.*

Now for *my* message. [*Goes out.*

ACT V

SCENE: *The stage of the Grosvenor Theatre. The curtain is down.* Scene-shifters *struggle with wrecked scenery, and* Property-men *carry out broken furniture. On the left, his head supported by* EUROPA TROOP, ST. JAMES'S *lies unconscious: two* Doctors *attend him.* SIR TRISTRAM, *whose clothes are torn and whose face is bruised and bloody, is talking with* MARK BELFRY *on the right. The Orchestra is playing fortissimo. Above the music an occasional whistle or cry is heard as the last of the audience leave the theatre. When the music ceases* WARWICK GROOM *enters on the left, and waits his opportunity unseen by the others.*

Belfry. [*Writing with a fountain-pen in a cheque-book.*]
By judgment, instinct, sense and common-sense
Deserted! Stagger me, Tristram! What, what? Why,
There's reams of print on crowd-psychology,
If quarter a century of the footlights left you
Ignorant of the hickory-hearted truth
That God's the popular voice, the public mind!
[*Offers* SIR TRISTRAM *a cheque.*
You deal?

Sir T. [*Taking the cheque.*] On terms. What play must I produce?

Belfry. No terms. [*Takes out his pocket-book and writes in it.*] I buy the theatre. Take Europa

To Monte Carlo, or live a decent life
At home here on the balance: it reaches that.
I want the Grosvenor.

Sir T. Do you mean—retire?

Belfry. You hit the white. The man that staged a play
To make the Lord sit up in a theatre
Is—fundamentally disqualified.
The man that stands Mark Belfry's impudence
Will take Mark Belfry's money: it never fails.

[*Tears from his pocket-book the page on which he has been writing and offers it to* SIR TRISTRAM.

Your signature?

Sir T. [*Declines the proffered document and tears up the cheque.*] No; not for twice the sum.
But treble it, and the Grosvenor Theatre's yours.

Belfry. I want the Grosvenor.

[*He writes another cheque and another receipt.* SIR TRISTRAM *takes the one, endorses it, and signs the other.*

So? You don't inquire?

Sir T. No, Belfry.

Belfry. I possess the Grosvenor now,
The premier theatre in London. Well,
I'm going to change it to a music-hall.

Sir T. You won't do that?

Belfry. I will. The drama's done.
This is a new thing I determine. Say:
I've fifty theatres in America,
And six in London; and I know. It pays,
Variety business pays: the public makes

Its entertainment, and it makes it that.

Sir T. Drama will flourish while there's love and hate.

Belfry. Although you wrote it in all the copy-books
'Twould still be true, Sir Tristram—as true as this,
That there must be religion while there's life.
But fashions wear, customs and costumes fade,
And change comes jesting like a conjurer.
The music-hall begins the world again
In Anglo-American drama:—not a joint
Of evolution about it; that's to come:—
A clean solution of continuity
Between the theatre about to be
And that which was. Your Bishop knew a thing:
It's Matter people want. Spirit's played out
For entertainment. Don't attack it, though!
You've had a lesson here to-night to last
A year or two.

Sir T. I shall not now retire,
But build another theatre. Death or life,
Labour or leisure balance the scales: again
A splendid stage, a strenuous time, because
You purpose to undo the thing I did.

Belfry. Build me a dozen, and I'll buy them all,
And fill them nightly with variety shows:
I'm at the heart of this and understand.

Sir T. You don't believe this, Belfry?

Belfry. Don't I? Say:
You reckon that your English Church is dead
Three hundred years or so, for all the state
It keeps, the wealth it grips?

Sir T. As dead as Pharaoh;

A mummy spiced and gilded.

Belfry. So's your drama!

I've heard you say it, and you know it's true;
The play to-night allowed it—the prologue did.
Theocracy and theatrocracy:
The one long dead; the other——

Sir T. Well?

Belfry. Stillborn!

Two things there are alive in England now,
As red as blood, as hot as fire: your crude
Salvation Army and your Music-Hall.
The first's no trade of mine; the other is;
And here's my theory of it. Your civilization
Evolves as barbarism in modern cities,
A highly decorated barbarism.
Your houses are merely wigwams where you sleep—
Sometimes. You dine abroad in crowds; then lug
Your indigestion to your music-hall
To drowse and smoke at ease. A play demands
A little intellect—which you hate to use:
Your music-hall assails your muscles mainly,
With ground and lofty tumbling, gymnasts, tramps,
Antipodists, weight-lifters, wrestlers; tricks
That gibe at gravitation; monkeys, dogs;
Illusions; jugglers, bipeds, quadrupeds;
Prodigious force and skill of man and beast,
Trained effort and sustained the savage loves
And feels his muscles pacified to watch.
The muscle business first: then comic turns;
Singers and dancers, bounders, jesters, cranks,
That make your savage laugh: he loves to laugh;
For what's your laughter but a free discharge

Of muscular energy under a pleased
Constraint. As for his slumbering fantasy,
The multitudinous rhythm and massive hues
Of Leicester Square's magnific ballets flood
The channels of his sense with undefined
Voluptuousness: your savage loves to dream
Obscure delights, uncertain glories. . . . What!
I tire you, Tristram? But I like the theme;
It takes me by the throat.

Sir T. The music-hall
Is utterly obscene, a heinous mart
Of alcohol and meretricious flesh.

Belfry. A prime, barbaric entertainment, fit
For gorged barbarians!

Sir T. But the theatre—

Belfry. Extinct: an anteroom to the nursery;
Annex to the lecture-hall; a mothers' meeting;
A kindergarten: men forsaken it quite.
Out of the music-hall a drama springs,
Naïve, natural, splendid; hidden, impossible,
But happily conceived when he arrives
Who shall beget it. You talk of messages,
Of orientation: there's my Yankee mite—
A budding drama in the music-hall.
I think I've read somewhere that once before
Dramatic monologue became a play—
When Aeschylus turned up in Attica!
You grant the halls are fairly Dionysian——

Groom. [*Stabs* SIR TRISTRAM.] I thought of this upon
your wedding-day,
And every summer since.

Sir T. [*Falls*] Help, Hildreth, help!

Belfry. [*Seizes* GROOM, *who makes no resistance*]
You murdering hound! Why—Groom! Of all men,
Groom!
Prince of good fellows and of actors! Groom!

Enter HILDRETH, SALERNE, *and* ABBOT. *Their clothes are torn and their faces scratched and bruised.* HILDRETH *kneels by* SIR TRISTRAM. SALERNE *and* ABBOT *take charge of* GROOM.

Hildreth. Tristram! My friend! My chief!
Sir T. Hildreth! Good lad!
Europa. You fool; you dull, dull groom! Let *me;* let *me!*
[EUROPA *and* HILDRETH *support* SIR TRISTRAM *while one of the* Doctors *attends to his wound.*
Tristram, you need me now!
Sir T. Europa! Yes;
I love to have a woman near me.—Death,
Sudden as I desired: but one regret—
One only; my theatre. If you had struck
Before I sold it!
Groom. Curse me, can't you, Tristram!
Belfry. [*To himself*] He'll want the bargain cancelled. Shall I? No;
I need the Grosvenor, and the Grosvenor's mine.
[*Goes out quickly.*
Sir T. [*Giving* HILDRETH *the cheque*] Yet I die solvent, Hildreth. Belfry's cheque:
It rings a merry peal. Unless—By Heaven!
Belfry, you'll not exact this now!
Hildreth. He's gone,
Sir Tristram.

Sir T. Fearing the appeal of death,
I verily believe.—A music-hall?
It matters nothing what comes after me:
I had my day.

Groom. Abuse, deride, provoke
Me back to madness: thought and deed are seas
Asunder: I would lay my own life down
Not to have struck. Machines we are, wound up
To weave we know not what. I languish now
Like wing'd exasperation that expends
A virulent dart, and, hebetated, dies.

Enter TEMPLE.

Temple. Sir Tristram! Where's my master?
Salerne. Silence, fool!
Temple. But something terrible has come to pass.
Sir T. Something extravagant since Temple shouts.
Temple. Are *you* dead also, sir?
Sir T. Not dead yet, Temple.
Who else is dead or dying? Is Gervase gone?
1st Doctor. The Bishop breathes again; but cannot live,
Though consciousness returns.
Sir T. Lay me beside him:
We two should die together.—Let Temple speak
Before you move me.—Temple, what's the matter?
Temple. Your lady, sir; she's dead; and on the floor
I found this vial.
Sir T. She lies at peace?
Temple. She seemed
Asleep. I tiptoed to the dressing-room
Afraid to wake her. Then I felt a ghost

Or something near me. Peeping out, I saw
No motion on the couch; the lady dead,
Her face like paper and her lips all blue.
Groom. I saw her die as sweetly as she lived,
A sacrifice forlorn. She should have been
A worshipped wife, a mother guarded close
With children: what she was we made her—you
And I——
Sir T. Enough of that!
Groom. Enough; it serves
My purpose gallantly! I feel again
The murderer in my nerves, not to be purged
Until the rope swings taut: out of the earth,
Through the foundations of your theatre,
It mounts into my brain, a seething fire.
How good it was to kill you—you that stood
Between me and the world!
Sir T. You took your chance
With others.
Groom. No; I left it all to chance,
And trusted to my genius.
Sir T. I relied
On friendship and the world's goodwill.
Groom. Cheats, both!
You were my friend, and therefore you betrayed me;
Only a friend it is that can betray;
And every friend's a traitor, first and last.
Sir T. Friendship and treachery synonymous?
Mine was the stronger nature.
Groom. The craftier!
You stole my love, you robbed me of my place,
Applause, consideration, ease, renown,

Riches and power that come of eminence;
And this you did by every mean device—
Sad revelation, innuendo, shrug,
Suggestive pity, supercilious smile——
Sir T. And you?
Groom. Oh!—I . . . I was magnanimous:
I wished to kill; but to the very last
Hugged the idea of a great eclipse
Of you and yours to send you sighing down
The bitter road, my foot upon the neck
Of all your fame.
Sir T. You lost the hope of that?
Groom. Therefore I struck.
Sir T. A candid murderer.
Groom. Men
Should kill each other. God, how it satisfies!
2nd Doctor. You must not talk, Sir Tristram.—Will you remove
That most unhappy man?

[SALERNE *and* ABBOT, *attended by* BLYTH *and* BOULDER, *who have entered, take* GROOM *up stage.*

Groom. Murder him; stab
The intimate friend, the inevitable foe!
I shall proclaim it from the prisoner's dock:
This is a gospel worth a thousand lies
Of tolerance and love. Did men cut off
The troublers of the world offence would cease.
When bland dissimulation paves a way
With broken pride that was its honest peer,
And chuckling craft destroys us unperceived
High time it is for men to kill outright!

[GROOM *is taken out.*

St. J. What dreadful voice is that?
2nd Doctor. A murderer's.
St. J. Whose?
2nd Doctor. One Warwick Groom.
St. J. The actor, Tristram's friend?
2nd Doctor. The same, my lord.
St. J. Whom has he slain?
2nd Doctor. His friend.
St. J. Is Tristram dead?
Sir T. I lie here dying, Gervase.—
Ah! Ah! Why torture me! I cannot live.
1st Doctor. It is the order of our art——
Sir T. Desist!
Desist, I say, at once; and damn your art.—
Pardon me, Doctor: I never could endure
A scratch with patience: let me die at ease.
1st Doctor. I might preserve your life a little while.
Sir T. How long?—Reply!
1st Doctor. I cannot say.
Sir T. A year?
1st Doctor. Oh no! Until the morning at the most.
Sir T. Take me to Gervase, Hildreth: quickly, Hildreth.

[HILDRETH, EUROPA, *and the* Doctors *bring* ST. JAMES'S *and* SIR TRISTRAM *together, and support them, that they may see each other while they converse.*

They've killed you, Gervase.
St. J. I wished to set them free.
This war will last a thousand years.
Sir T. For us
The war is over: notwithstanding, speak

Your errand once again. Things in my life
There are I would forget: your message wipes
The world out.

St. J. All the past, both good and ill,
My message clears away.

Sir T. Leaving pure Matter:
I love it!—And a world begun anew:
That moved me most of all:—to launch the world
In space again upon a virgin track,
As though the foul old rut and blood-drenched way
Had never been. I feel it, as I die,
So deeply: actual world, and actual man.

St. J. Yes; let us watch that man! I see him stand
In majesty material, the Nessus-shirt
Of spirit, warp, and woof of legend dyed
In many-coloured Sin, the mordant shame
That cankered life, and clung, a grafted hide,
About his innocent flesh, fallen off, or flayed
With hideous woe, and in its proper filth
Corrupted into naught. Forthwith the world
Begins again, not even a pallid dream
Of legendary pasts to cloud the dawn.
I say it simply;—With the Universe
Man clothes himself; arrayed in time and space,
In darkness and in light, no lamp, no gleam
He follows, for the sun illumines him,
And every sun, his kinsmen in the skies,
The systems, constellations, galaxies.
At home in the empyrean, issuing thence,
His free imagination momently
Remembers flame pellucid, which it was,

And will be in the nebula again,
When all the orbs that stock the loins of night
Return into the sun, and fill with seed
Of chastest fire the impassioned womb of space.
Sir T. We fill the abyss, left in the Universe
By cancelling God, with the Universe itself.
Great is it, Gervase; but the terror of it!
St. J. Terror and splendour, Tristram! Who shall tell—
Who shall persuade the kings that God is not,
The politicians, usurers, financiers,
Priests, warriors, that depend on God to bear
The burden of their inhumanities?
All inhumanity that flings itself
On God's unsearchable device will fight
To the last drop of blood, last labouring sigh
For God and Heaven and Hell. And who shall teach
The orphans that their mothers are not; who
Unpeople Heaven of lovers, children, saints?
Women will fight with babies at their breasts,
Old palsied hags, peace-lovers, cripples, cowards,
When this is put to war. Their sons that died
In battle, where are they? Their enemies
That should lament in Hell? The little child
That lived a year and holds its parents' hearts
In dimpled hands for ever? Christ himself
That pardoned wanton women, where is he?
Sir T. It cannot be undone!
St. J. It can, it will!
For through the mist of tears and blood I see
A greater breed of men, a nobler world,

THE THEATROCRAT

An independent power in the Universe,
The Universe itself become aware.

Sir T. **The Universe itself become aware.**

[*Neither speaks again, and shortly both die within a few moments of each other.*

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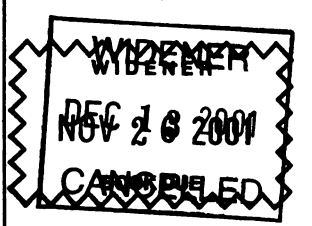

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